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OCTAVIA





# *OCTAVIA*

*By*

*MARGOT OXFORD*



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*Dedicated to*  
**ELIZABETH**  
**COR CORDIUM**



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# OCTAVIA

## CHAPTER I

### *DUNROSS*

**M**R. DAVENTRY was rich, modern, and busy. He had no sentiment about old places. To his hasty objective mind, what was shabby and tumbled-down should be dispensed with, or built up again ; and when—in 1905—he acquired an estate in the wildest corner of the Scottish Border, he set about building himself a comfortable house on the ruins of its predecessor.

Dunross was a property consisting of fifty thousand acres of moorland and a few low-lying and unprofitable fields. North, east, south, and west, it marched with estates belonging to lairds of little intelligence and ancient lineage. Situated under the shadow of the Lammermuirs, it was as wild and beautiful as any part of the Highlands ; and, though in the heart of a country associated with Scott and the Ettrick Shepherd, it had the distinction of being unfrequented.

The advent of the Daventry family was not looked upon with favour by the county. It had always been a Conservative stronghold ; and the rumour that Mr. Daventry intended to unseat the sitting member—who had championed their cause in unbroken silence for over thirty years in the House of Commons—added nothing to his popularity.

The new proprietor of Dunross, however, had too many



irons in the fire to be drawn into an Election, and addressing Board meetings had not trained him in the art of public speaking. But as one of his favourite occupations was reading aloud the speeches of great orators, there was every reason to believe the rumour; and the neighbouring aristocracy viewed with dismay the encroachment upon their lands of a Radical, and a self-made man.

Mr. Daventry, his wife, family, and dependants, formed a community of their own, and hostile criticism would not have affected them even if they had been aware of it.

Though immersed in business, Mr. Daventry was a man of many tastes and not insensible to beauty. By nature restless and irritable, he took every opportunity to escape from his stocks and shares and bulls and bears to the healing silence of the hills. Self-centred and gregarious, beyond his wife, his children, and his possessions, he was attached to nobody; and though he took pride in accumulating the fortune which he had made in Glasgow, he derived quite as much pleasure from spending it.

He was a little man of good figure, neat in his person, and of devouring activity. He whirled Indian clubs round his head every morning before breakfast, was a fine rider, an excellent shot, and few could beat him at the short game upon a golf-course. He had started a collection of pictures by buying those which had been conspicuous in the Royal Academy; but his taste having developed, he became the possessor of Hogarths, Gainsboroughs, Morelands and Reynolds's of great value. When not engaged in sport, he would occupy himself for hours at a time in hanging and re-hanging these pictures in what he thought favourable lights, to the monotonous accompaniment of his wife's half-hearted surprise.

Mrs. Daventry was an unfinished woman of great beauty. She was evasive, irrelevant, and refined, and not without penetration. She acquiesced in rather than enjoyed the company of her husband's business friends, and her garden

had always been of more importance than her nursery. Modest and conventional, her character had frayed from lack of use, and, like clothes hung in the cupboards of great-grandparents, she fell to pieces when fingered by a younger generation. She was fond of her children, but not attached to them, and took no trouble to make them understand her. Either from an early disappointment in love, or from an ingrained suspicion of the human race, she had erected a barrier of reserve between herself and the world. Being of low vitality, she cultivated a feline and disarming small-talk which was intellectually depressing.

Observing her family growing up independent of her influence and in the demoralizing atmosphere of their father's praise, her one idea was to exercise a moderating influence; and without knowing it, she would in a subtle and disparaging manner check the enthusiasm, dim the glow, and cramp the extravagance of every one round her. Her attitude towards life was a source of mild amusement to Mr. Daventry, but it alienated the other members of the family.

Nothing separates one human being from another more than their inner attitude towards life. Some have a very faint hold upon it, others a tenacious grip; some a healthy appetite, others a morbid curiosity; while the vast majority are—as Americans say—content “to stay put.” Mrs. Daventry was content “to stay put.”

Pillow-lace, the gardens and conservatories, were a perpetual pleasure and repose, and she was never tired of reading half out loud and half to herself items of interest from the nurserymen's catalogues. When the weather was bad she would sit near the fire and be heard murmuring:

“Glamour, a seedling of the Dominion race, has again fulfilled all our expectations. Smooth and stout textured, splendid bold erect habit, it is a strong branching grower and particularly free flowering. While the blooms are not so large as those of ‘Titan’ or ‘Moa,’ they have great substance. The finely arched standards are heliotrope, and the



falls a deep maroon with a prominent purple beard. The Princess of Wales very yellow; a free bedder, and rather frilled," etc. The picture would then fade before Mrs. Daventry's closing eyes and the *Gardener's Chronicle* fall from her hands.

There were five children in the Daventry family, and a distant cousin—Dick Filmer—who was Mr. Daventry's ward, and spent his holidays at Dunross. Victoria, the eldest, had married a prosperous wool merchant and gone to live in Australia. Joe and Timothy, who had finished their educations without beginning their careers, were manly, simple fellows entirely engrossed in travel and sport, and Bill was still at Cambridge. Octavia, who was the youngest, while inheriting some of her mother's shrewdness and all her father's impulse, was of a different temperament to the rest of her family. They were lively, affectionate children, and had a clannish feeling for their home and one another.

Octavia had a thick skin of magnolia white and high cheek-bones. If her nose was a little insolent, its effect was softened by the beauty of her eyes, which were of arresting intensity. Her mouth was large, her smile rare, and her little head was proudly set upon a long and lovely throat. Her short curling hair was the colour of stones at the bottom of a burn. Although she was not tall, her legs were long and finely shaped, and she moved with grace and agility. In her mother's catalogue she would have been described as: "Quite distinct, rather free, but uncertain of development in a sheltered garden."

Fearless, quick and truthful, she was too busy with life to care much about what others thought of her; nor had she many opportunities of knowing. Beyond her brothers' friends she knew but few people, and those she met were of no great penetration. Her mother shunned intimacies, and her father was engrossed in City affairs, about which Octavia was not only ignorant but profoundly indifferent.

Her natural happiness and intrepidity gave her an imme-

diate ascendancy over her brothers' Eton and Cambridge friends. Half bold, half shy, she would lure young men to feats of prowess in which she herself excelled ; and her sense of humour, gift of expression and ready sympathy made her half comrade, half queen.

The two people she cared most for were Dick Filmer and Robin Compton ; but her feelings for them were very different. Dick was a year older than Octavia, and though an ardent admirer had never been afraid of criticizing her. Their close alliance had started over an episode which had taken place at Dunross when he was little more than fifteen.

The day before Dick was to go back to Eton he and Octavia were playing in the courtyard. Miserable at the thought that his holiday was over, he was full of schemes as to how they were to amuse themselves. At his suggestion they made bets as to which of them could hit a given object, and collected a pile of stones for the purpose.

"Come on, Octavia, let's have a shot at the lion !" said Dick. "I bet I hit him and you won't."

He flung a large stone at a lion ornamenting the portals of the front door. It cannoned off a buttress in the wall and broke a pane of glass in one of the windows of Mr. Daventry's dressing-room. Had this been an isolated action on his part it might have passed without censure, but Dick had done so much damage with balls, bats, and stones during his holidays, that his guardian had been obliged to warn him that if he found another cricket ball on the drawing-room floor, fives ball in the boudoir, cracked china, or broken window-panes, he would have to spend his Christmas with his uncle.

Perceiving her father's buff waistcoat behind the *Financial Times* coming slowly towards them, Octavia seized a stone from the pile beside her and, flinging it with all her force, smashed the adjacent window-pane.

Mr. Daventry had come near enough to hear the crash



of glass. Putting his newspaper behind his back, he said :  
 "May I ask what this is all about, Octavia ?"

"I'm ever so sorry, papa, but my stone went through your window. I'm not much of a shot, you know, but I'm learning," she said demurely.

"Pray confine your practice to places of safety. If Dick is your instructor, go to the tennis-court," replied Mr. Daventry. As he disappeared Dick threw his arm round Octavia's waist and, giving her a resounding kiss, said :

"My God ! You *are* a ripper ! and the best shot I ever saw in my life."

From that moment he was her slave, and she was the heroine of his dreams.

With the exception of Octavia, Mr. Daventry thought all his children stupid, and though in part responsible himself, he blamed his sons for their idleness. Afraid that he might be persuaded to put them into his own business, he encouraged them to travel, and was always relieved when he heard them planning expeditions to shoot big game. All he asked was that they should not bring home stuffed trophies of bears and tigers to hang upon the walls, or trip guests up upon the carpet.

None of the young Daventrys cared for London, and though the isolation of a wild country had sharpened their powers of observation it had made them a little awkward in society.

Octavia had given her parents much anxiety in her early year, as she was a fragile little creature who, from the ignorance of nurses and doctors, had been urged to swallow fattening foods against her inclination. This had produced indigestion, which upset her temper and disturbed her sleep, and for several years the fear that she might become an invalid made every one in the household combine to pet, cajole, and amuse her. A change of diet restored her to health, and she developed into a wiry active child, accustomed to having her own way. Passionate and romantic,

she was full of vague and soaring ideas, which her mother not only thought foolish, but took every opportunity of discouraging. Whenever a discussion arose, her distilled deductions, cramping and disjointed comments exasperated Octavia, and though these arguments were not frequent, they created a tepid intimacy between them.

On one occasion when the humour of both of them was at its most characteristic and dividing, Octavia made her first fierce and fiery protest.

"Really, mama!" she exclaimed, "you take the bloom off everything you touch. It's the sin against the Holy Ghost, the unforgivable sin, to cripple hope in the way you do. I wonder you can live when your outlook is so flat!"

Surprised at this outburst, Mrs. Daventry replied without heat:

"I'm sorry, darling, if I said anything to provoke you. I really don't remember what I said, but I hope it wasn't blasphemous. I have never understood the meaning of the text you allude to. I prefer addressing my prayers to God; I have always found the Holy Ghost unsatisfactory. I think you read too much. You over-excite yourself; you should learn to make pillow-lace, it would rest your nerves and give you more self-control. I met a lady at Malvern who told me once that her health had been much benefited by learning to make lace."

Finding her mother out of sympathy with her changing humours, Octavia made a life of her own, and when not riding, or following her brothers and their friends on the moors, she would sit for hours together reading and marking books.

Mrs. Daventry—who seldom opened a book—thought it a mistake for girls to read. She favoured what she considered more normal occupations, and encouraged the young men whom her sons brought to the house to play games with Octavia. Having been a great flirt herself, she understood



and enjoyed her daughter's successes. Nothing shocked her, nothing surprised her, and she was satisfied that, with the exception perhaps of Joe's older friend—Robin Compton—no man had made an inroad into her daughter's heart. But he was seventeen years older than Octavia, and as his tastes were concerned with horses and hunting, their friendship caused her no anxiety.

Octavia's love of riding dated from a visit to Dunross paid by a rich friend of her father's when she was a little girl. He was an observant old Scotchman who had been attracted by her intelligent face and vivacious manners. When he praised her looks, Mrs. Daventry answered :

"Octavia has my mother's eyes, but I cannot think where she gets her nose from."

When he hinted she was clever, Mrs. Daventry answered with raised eyebrows : "I am afraid she is."

One day when he was alone with Octavia he asked her whether she would rather be good or pretty, to which she answered :

"Oh ! good ; as I knowse I'se pretty, but I'm *awful* bad !"

For this endearing reply he gave her a pony that could jump ; and from that moment she rode anything she could find, from the cart-horses in the farm to the high-steppers harnessed to the family barouche.

No one who has not felt the effect of physical exercise upon exuberant vitality and courage can measure the power it has over human nature ; and it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that after galloping round the fields and over the fences Octavia felt she could face the devil.

Mrs. Daventry did not understand either physical or intellectual vitality, and was too low-gearred to care for experiments. She liked placid punctual things, detested ambition, and distrusted all forms of introspection. She noticed with concern Octavia's increasing detachment, and encouraged her to ride with Robin as she thought it belonged to the wholesome side of her daughter's nature. She liked him

better than the other young men who came to Dunross, and he never bewildered her by discussing serious subjects.

Robin Compton was the only son of a Lincolnshire squire, from whom he had inherited the sort of fortune that enables a young man to live comfortably without a profession. His mother had died when he was a child ; and as his father kept hounds and was seldom off a horse, his boyhood had been spent more in the stables than the schoolroom. Self-indulgent and indolent, he had learnt nothing at Eton, and devoted his ill-earned leisure at Oxford to improvising a drag, and hunting with the Bicester.

Robin was born without ambition or moral conscience. Laziness, effrontery, and good spirits, added to an incapacity to exert himself in intellectual matters, had made him enjoy the material side of life to the exclusion of everything else. His proficiency in games, fine riding, and achievements in the hunting-field, satisfied him that his intelligence was at least equal, if not superior, to other people's. Self-indulgent by nature and by cultivation, the stupid society he had chosen to live amongst assisted him to camouflage his conscience, and having devoted such energy as he had entirely to the pursuit of pleasure he was always a little tired.

The idea of marriage had become faded and remote. He was thirty-four and Octavia seventeen ; but the difference in their ages was greater than this. He had not only spent and wasted his life, but was moulded by a world from which he had no desire to escape. He thought he had been in love many times, but till he met Octavia he had never loved anybody but himself. Her companionship revived his energy and renewed his youth ; and when he was not hunting in Leicestershire or buying horses in Ireland, he would pay long and sudden visits to Dunross. Echoes of past successes made him observe the trouble Octavia took with her appearance when she was with him ; and impulses that she did not restrain were indications to a man of his experience that he was physically attractive to her. Robin was



## OCTAVIA

not at all certain what Octavia's feelings were for him. At times his love for her was so great that he longed to capture her : at others he realized that were he to succeed, it would not be for her happiness. Always aware of the disparity, not only of their ages but their outlook, he alternated between the desire to possess and the wish to protect her.

## CHAPTER II

### *THE PROFESSOR*

**P**ROFESSOR HORNCastle lived twenty miles from Dunross by road and ten miles across the hills, and was as little known to the neighbouring lairds as the Daventrys. His house was situated near a bridge by the river which separated the two counties, and though of no architectural merit had a beauty of its own. It might have been a Monastery or it might have been a Manor, and you could see by the staircase and broken corners of the carved doors that it had been owned by people of distinction. The wrought-iron gateway leading into the courtyard was supported by stone pillars on which a pair of prancing animals half stag, half unicorn, stood erect, and clasped to their straight chests a lozenge-shaped shield. Time had obliterated the date, but the motto, "Judge nought," was still decipherable, and was repeated over the front door and on the sundial in the garden. There was little or no view, but down a short avenue of silver firs you could see the river, and on either side of the paved paths there were borders of sweet-smelling flowers.

No one knew much about the Professor, except that he was a bachelor, a botanist, and a man of learning. He was tall, shabby, and loosely built; and if his features were not regular, the deep-set eyes under his forehead gave him a countenance that was arresting. Although by birth a Scotchman, he had been a Don at Cambridge, where he lectured upon classical philosophy to young men whose

friendship he preserved long after he had ceased to teach them.

Rumour—which is always busy, even with unfashionable people—attributed his abandoning a University career at the height of his powers to an unfortunate love affair. Little was known and much said about it at the time ; but the tales told were of such a contradictory character that a clash of opinions had obscured the truth.

The outline of the story was that the Professor had met a lady in a storm, when they had taken refuge under a tree in the Backs at Cambridge. He was young, and she was attractive, and he had fallen in love with her. From the accidental encounter an unsuspected friendship sprang up between them. As long as her husband—who was a man of parts, and a Don at another college—was unknown to him, matters went smoothly ; but when the Professor found his love enmeshing him in a network of deception, and not only disintegrating his life but disorganizing his conscience, he determined to put an end to the affair. Having a comfortable income, he resigned his work, retired to Scotland, and bought the house near the bridge on the Border.

There was not a dyke, ditch, or burn in the country that he did not know, and he was never tired of tramping the moors.

One day, starting later for his walk than was his custom, he was held up on the Lammermuirs by a stretch of impassable bog, and thanks to a long *détour* found himself without guidance and at a loss to know where he was. Vague and stranded, he wandered into the shrubberies of the Dunross garden. It was a breezy beautiful evening of cloud and sun, and he sat down to light his pipe upon a green seat under the shelter of a wall.

He had heard a good deal about Dunross, though little about its inhabitants ; and seeing the blinds of the house were down, he wondered if a caretaker could be persuaded to show him the pictures. He did not care much about other



people's houses, but it seemed a pity to have come so far without at least making some effort to see a collection that was famous.

He was speculating on his line of action when he heard a curious sound—a sort of yodel, melancholy and musical, and looking up, he saw a girl standing upon the wall.

She did not see him, and was intent on trying to attract the attention of someone on the other side of the garden. She was standing without shoes or stockings, her figure towards him, and her face turned away. The wind pressing against her revealed the moulding of both her breasts, and a strange sash of Oriental colours was tied round the dress which was blowing about her naked knees. A sort of turban concealed her face, and she was holding a silver lance in one hand.

“That’s not allowed, Dick!” she shouted. “It’s not your part; I’m Don Quixote. If you won’t rehearse properly I shall stop.”

The Professor could not hear what was said in reply, but presumed it was not satisfactory, as she retorted:

“Oh! very well; then I shall go in!”

Turning round, she sat down and dangled her legs over the wall. On seeing a stranger sitting on the seat below, her eyes widened, and the Professor perceived the red blood working slowly under her pale skin. She looked at him with a long, steady and unabashed gaze which he returned. Pulling vigorously at his pipe, he felt the weight of an embarrassing silence. Pressing her petticoats down over both her knees, she said:

“Have you come here to see the house, or the gardens; or anyone in particular, sir?”

The challenge of her tone was not convincing, and he replied with unaccustomed temerity:

“No; I can’t say that I have! . . . Supposing I told you I had come to see Don Quixote, what would you say?”

Perceiving something inscrutable in his expression, and struck by the unusualness of his face, Octavia felt she was in for an adventure, and that it would be stupid of her—particularly in the rôle she was assuming—if she did not take advantage of the situation.

“Then you have come to the right place,” she said with a smile; “if you will remain where you are, I’ll get off the wall and talk to you.”

At this she disappeared.

The Professor watched the pewits circling above his head and felt the wind getting up cold and pure. But his thoughts were moving fast and far away. He was thinking of a seat under an elm tree at the back of an English University, and the face and figure of a woman . . .

The vision faded, and his reflections were brought to a standstill by the sight of Octavia walking slowly up the path towards him.

“I’m afraid I’ve startled you and spoilt your game,” he said as she stopped in front of him.

“It wasn’t a game,” she answered. “We were rehearsing a sort of play I’ve been writing. I was doing Don Quixote and . . . What were you doing?”

“I have come over the Lammermuirs and, losing my way, found myself in this garden. I was wondering if I could get inside the house and see the pictures. Do you know the people here? . . . What are they like? Are they hospitable?”

Enchanted at seeing he did not know who she was, Octavia replied :

“I know them a little, but they’re strange people; no one knows them very well. I’m not sure if they’re hospitable or not.”

“In what way are they strange?” he asked.

“That’s rather difficult to answer—they’re all very different. Have you never heard of them?”

“I can’t say that I have,” said the Professor. “What are they like? I suppose they’re cultivated.”



## THE PROFESSOR

"I should hardly say that," she replied; "but they've got a lot of books, and some of them read. Do you like books?"

"I sometimes think I don't," he said; "but I'm fond of 'Don Quixote.' If you know the family, could you not introduce me to them?"

"They've gone to London. There's no one here except the boys, me, and Dick."

"And who may Dick be?" asked the Professor, knocking the ashes out of his pipe and changing his position to make room for her to sit upon the seat. She did not move.

"If you tell me who you are, I'll tell you about Dick: I might even introduce him to you," she said, pulling off her turban.

"That is very thoughtful of you; but I'm in no hurry to meet Dick," said the Professor.

"It's just as well," she replied. "Dick hates strangers!"

"I'm glad you told me. Do the whole family hate strangers?"

"Oh yes, we all do." Then feeling that what she had said was both tactless and betraying, she added: "That's to say *some* of us do."

"I hope," said the Professor with a grave smile, "that does not include you."

She turned a little away from him.

"I don't know. Do you count people you meet abroad?"

"Have you been much abroad?" he asked.

"I've been to London and Paris, and perhaps I shall go to Munich next year to finish my education."

"Aren't you a little young to complete your education? —I am only just beginning mine," he said.

"Then you've come to the right place," she observed.

"I'm sure you could teach me a lot," he said, "and if you . . ."

At this she interrupted him, and sitting down suddenly, said:

"Of course I didn't mean that!—I meant—if you care for books and pictures, the house over there is full of them."

"Does Dick like books and pictures?" asked the Professor.

"Dick!—He never opens a book, and doesn't know a picture from a lithograph!"

"In that case," he said, "we could perhaps see the pictures alone together."

The sun had gone down and clouds, black and ominous, were gathering above the close horizon. The Professor was wondering how he should get home when their thoughts crossed.

"Have you far to go?" she asked. "Because we're in for a storm. I'm a shepherd, and know this country well."

"So am I," he replied. "I shan't get home till late. I live miles across the moor, by the bridge on the Border."

"You don't mean that lovely house I've so often longed to see! The harled house with the iron railings, and '*Judge nought*' written over the gateway?" exclaimed Octavia.

"Yes, that's my house; I'm glad you want to see it. Let's make a bargain," he said. "If you can get the servants to show me this house, you can come to mine as often as you like. But what will Dick say?"

"As if I cared what Dick says!" she exclaimed. "So you are Professor Horncastle!"

"I am," he replied. "And who are you?"

"Who do you think?" she replied, with her eyes fixed on his.

"You have just told me you are Don Quixote," he answered. "But you have lost your lance; so for the moment you can't tilt at a poor stranger."

"No—but *really*!—say what you *REALLY* think. I believe you know perfectly well all the time!" she said.

The Professor looked at her lovely little face and said:

"You do me injustice—I assure you I don't."

"I'm Octavia Daventry," she said.



## THE PROFESSOR

The rain was coming down in large and single drops.

The Professor put his plaid round her shoulders as they hurried through the garden to the house.

. . . . .  
Octavia saw a great deal of the Professor while her parents were away. For the first time in her life she had met a man who interested her, and to whom she could say anything she liked. She was never tired of talking to him ; explaining at length her views upon the problems of life ; and he delighted in discussing the books she had read, and recommending new ones that would fill the gaps of her rudimentary education.

When the Daventrys returned, Octavia persuaded them to invite him to Dunross, but she felt apprehensive when he accepted the invitation. She did not think the atmosphere of her home would be congenial, and feared her parents would not appreciate him. The brothers had been a little dumb when they first met him, but when they found he knew all about big game and the strange ways of salmon, they shared their sister's enthusiasm, and even Dick—a little jealous of Octavia's new interest—looked upon him with respect.

The Professor was made welcome ; and Mrs. Daventry, while disapproving of his clothes, confessed that his knowledge of flowers excelled her gardeners'. As he was never tired of being taken round the pictures and hearing them praised, he was looked upon as a connoisseur by Mr. Daventry, and accepted by the whole family.

Octavia was not so happy. She observed a tendency on the Professor's part to be more restrained with her than he had been before, and she became shrill and controversial when the weather kept them all in the same room together.

One evening after a day of black rain the family and the Professor met in the library for tea. Dick was curled up on the sofa reading "The Girl in the Brown Habit," Joe, Bill,



and Timothy were sorting salmon flies. Mr. Daventry was trying to find Grattan's speeches, while his wife was seated behind a high and hissing urn. A flow of the smallest of small-talk rippled over the toast and the teacups.

"I am so glad you liked Malvern! It is nicely situated; I have many pleasant recollections of it. Hot-house plants grow in profusion out of doors. I saw the first sago-palm there. Have you ever seen the sago-palm? . . . No? . . . I am not surprised; it was found by a doctor of, I think Dutch—no—it may have been Swiss origin. . . . Do you like your tea weak or strong?" said Mrs. Daventry to the Professor.

"I know you're going to say 'Just as it comes,'" said Octavia, getting up suddenly to ring the bell.

"Is there anything you want, darling?" said Mrs. Daventry, looking up and ceasing to pour out the tea.

"I want to see Merlin and hear what the vet. said about Tatts," she answered.

"Surely, my dear, there is time enough for that," said Mrs. Daventry deprecatingly. "Your father is going to read out loud to us. . . . One lump or two, Professor? . . . Octavia has strange friends; she is perfectly happy in the society of grooms."

"Merlin has not only got the best seat on a horse," interposed Dick, "but is the best company in the world: he can't spout poetry and knows nothing about philosophy, but he thoroughly understands human nature. I would rather listen to him than to Grattan's speeches any day!"

Mounted on a library ladder, Mr. Daventry was turning over the pages of a book.

"I don't know who moves the books," said he. "I come home and always find them either out of their places or on their heads. You might speak to the housemaids, my love. . . . Well, I can't find what I was looking for; but here is a magnificent passage from Burke. No doubt this will be familiar to you," he said, looking over his spectacles at the

Professor. "My children are profoundly ignorant ; I don't believe Master Dick has ever heard of Burke."

"Oh yes, I have, Mr. Daventry ! He's the chap who snatched corpses from their coffins," said Dick.

"Pray, papa, do not read anything disagreeable about the dead," expostulated Mrs. Daventry. "Won't you have a muffin, Professor ? you're eating nothing."

Mr. Daventry glanced at Dick over his spectacles as he climbed down the ladder, and seating himself in an arm-chair proceeded to read. The emotion in his voice was more moving to himself than to his hearers. Dick looked at Octavia, Octavia eyed the Professor, and Mrs. Daventry assumed the pained and interested expression of someone anxious to engage their own attention.

" 'Perhaps this House is not the place where our reasons can be of any avail . . . ' "

"Hear, hear !" muttered Dick.

"Hold your tongue, you idiot !" said Octavia, kicking his ankle. Mr. Daventry continued :

" 'The great person who is to determine on this question may be a being far above our view : one so immeasurably high, that the greatest abilities or the most amiable dispositions that are to be found in this House may not gain access to him ; a being before whom thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues, and powers, all veil their faces with their wings ; but though our arguments may not reach him, probably our prayers will.' "

"It sounds almost like a quotation," said Mrs. Daventry, "and so like Grattan ! I always think the Irish . . . "

"That wasn't Grattan, my dear ; it was Burke. There's not a man in the House of Commons to-day who could have made that peroration. Do you agree, Professor ? " said Mr. Daventry.

Without waiting for an answer, he leant forward to get a better light on his book and, turning over a page, continued :

" 'I will tell these young Ministers the true source of



intelligence. Sagacity to compare causes and effects ; to judge the present state of things ; and discern the future by a careful view of the past. Oliver Cromwell, who astonished mankind by his intelligence, did not derive it from spies in every Cabinet in Europe : he drew it from the cabinet of his own sagacious mind.' ”

“ That’s Chatham, isn’t it, Mr. Daventry ? ” asked the Professor.

“ It is,” replied his host. “ Do you know this little book ? If not, I shall be pleased to give you a copy of it. Stop talking, children ! ”

Before Mr. Daventry had readjusted his spectacles the door opened and the footman announced :

“ Mr. Merlin.”

Mr. Daventry returned to his ladder, and Dick, throwing away his book, pulled his chair close to Octavia’s so as not to miss a word of the conversation.

Merlin—standing five feet high—had a little head carved like the top of an umbrella ; a tanned skin pulled tight across sharp features, and not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him. Cunning and cheerful, he knew everything about horses, and there was little he could not guess about people. He hardly ever said “ Miss,” seldom said “ Sir,” and his shrewd and insolent disposition made him popular with every class in which he mixed. He was detested by Mrs. Daventry, tolerated by Mr. Daventry, a diversion to the guests, and a god to Dick.

“ Well, Merlin, what did the vet. say ? ” asked Octavia.

“ Not much. ’E’s a nice man is Mr. Nagget, but ’e knows most about dogs. ’E just said, ‘ The ’orse is not ’isself.’ You did ’im no good Monday. You can’t jostle every ’orse, you know. Young ones want steadyin’ a bit.”

“ What did he say we ought to do ? ” asked Octavia.

“ Well,” said Merlin, reflecting but decisive, “ go on much the same as I’m doing—quiet and cold water.”

“ When will he be out again ? ”

## THE PROFESSOR

"Can't say for sure. Anything else, miss . . . ?"

"No, thanks. Good night, Merlin," said Octavia. And turning to the Professor as her groom shut the door, she exclaimed: "Merlin is the only friend I have in the world!"

"Really, Octavia! One might suppose you were an injured person, instead of being the most spoilt of all my children. The Professor is hardly likely to agree with you," said Mrs. Daventry.

"I rather hope he won't agree with either of us!" retorted Octavia. "It's too tiresome! I shan't be able to ride over to Hawk's Craig now; but next week it may be all right."

"In that case, let it be next week, Miss Octavia; and you may meet someone there who will challenge the opinions upon friendship that you have just expressed," said the Professor.

"Who's going to be there?" asked Octavia with curiosity.

"I shall not invite Merlin . . . I shall be alone," he replied.

## CHAPTER III

### *OCTAVIA*

**B**EFORE the Professor left the Daventrys Robin Compton proposed himself to Dunross. Octavia always looked forward to his visits. He was a man of a different world from hers, and she was aware of a slight rise in temperature when she was with him. His acute observation made her take trouble with her appearance, and it flattered her when he quoted what she had said. But, though she overvalued all Robin could teach her about horses and hunting, she did not find him altogether satisfying. Morally lenient, socially severe, he seemed to lack ambition. She thought him becalmed ; in spite of his charm, she felt he was stationary.

She reflected that he did not want anything improved, not even herself ; and when they were not riding, his conversation gave her little to think about. He said he understood all she said, but he never asked her what she meant. When she told him she was fickle—and that what delighted her on Monday was tolerated on Tuesday, hated Wednesday, and enchanted her again on Thursday—he merely lit a cigar and said something about her being like a sea wind in a stuffy room. In a subconscious way she felt it would take very little to make him fall in love with her, but that was not at all what she wanted. To be loved was as necessary to her as the air she breathed, but the man she was to love must be different. He must be full of moral and intellectual ambition, and difficult to satisfy.



## OCTAVIA

The idea of marriage played hardly any part in Octavia's meditations. To be loved was just as it should be, but she wanted to love someone who would bring out depths in herself which had never yet been plumbed: she had a passionate desire to *feel* life as well as to live it.

The day Robin was to arrive Octavia went to the station to meet him. As she motored along in the freshness of the early morning she wondered how Robin would get on with the Professor. She could not think of a single idea they would have in common; the more she thought of it the more she regretted she had not had the wits to postpone his visit. She consoled herself by reflecting that if the weather was fine she would be riding; and if wet, she could prevent him interrupting her talks with the Professor. He might of course want to join in, but she did not think this would be a success; for though she had observed Robin occasionally listen to serious conversation she had never heard him contribute to it.

The train was in, and Robin was looking out for her. After tucking the rug comfortably round them, he asked her what she had been doing with herself.

"Do you know you've only written to me once since I left? I began to think someone else was teaching you to ride, and that you had made a new friend."

"How clever of you! I *have* made a new friend, but he hasn't been teaching me to ride."

"Ah, that's a relief! Tell me, Octavia, shall I like him?"

"I'm not sure that you will."

"Why? Is he heavy and serious?"

"He's interested in things you don't care about."

"Are you so sure you know what I care about? Is he fond of you?"

"I'm devoted to him; and I rather think he likes me," she replied.

"Well, there you are! He *is* interested in what I care about," said Robin, turning to look into her face.

"I didn't mean that," she said, looking away from him. "I meant he understands books, and thoughts . . . and the puzzling things of life."

"That sounds all right. But if you like him, why shouldn't I?"

Octavia did not answer at once. After a pause, she said thoughtfully:

"He's one of the few people I like as much when I'm away from him as when I'm with him. It's an odd thing . . . but though I don't care about being liked merely in the abstract, I dislike even more being liked in the concrete. The fact is, I must be liked *both* ways. When I'm there I must be liked in the abstract, and when I'm not there I must be liked in the concrete. It's very awkward. What do you think?"

"I quite understand; and your injunctions shall be obeyed. But I shouldn't be surprised if one day you changed your views. You're seventeen, and you may perhaps fall in love. Who can tell! Then you'll find your knowledge of yourself is wrong, and all your theories split to smithereens. What you need, Octavia, is an outlet," said Robin, with a gravity that surprised her. "You should persuade your parents to let you hunt. I'll wager I could find you two good horses, and I could get the Brabazons to ask you to Harbington."

"Oh, Mr. Compton, wouldn't that be wonderful! Will you really? And are you going to hunt there yourself?"

"You bet!" he replied, moved by the enchantment of her face. For a moment their eyes met; then he buried his hand in the pocket of his coat and pulled out his cigar-case.

Joe Daventry was on the doorstep to greet them as the motor pulled up.

"Ah! there you are! Swallow your breakfast, Robin, and take your gun. We're shooting over Cadden Bank. You'll bring the Professor along and join us, Octavia; we're lunching at the 'Punch Bowl.'"



## OCTAVIA

"I thought of taking the Professor to the loch . . ."

"Oh, Octavia, that won't be half such fun!" said Bill, joining them. "The fact is, you're soft on the Professor."

The door was open leading into the inner hall and the Professor, who was reading his letters, heard what Bill had said. Turning to Octavia, who looked self-conscious, he said:

"I'm relieved to hear from Bill that you aren't hard on me, Miss Octavia."

"This is Mr. Compton, Professor," said Octavia, hoping Robin had not noticed her embarrassment.

The two men shook hands, and Robin went upstairs.

Though the day was of an extraordinary beauty, the heather blushing and the distance blue, Octavia, for some unaccountable reason, felt overwhelmingly depressed. In spite of her vitality she was a creature of moods, and while expecting a great deal from life, there were moments in which she resented its inexpressiveness.

After an exhausting day on the Moors, Octavia walked back in the evening with the Professor. Seeing she was in a serious humour, he told her he had been interested in her *Commonplace Book*; a volume full of varied and unequal literary quotations which she had given him to read.

He quoted a passage from Thomas à Kempis that she had written in red ink:

*"Yield thyself utterly passive to this life into His hands who is Lord of a better."*

"I often wish I had never written it," said Octavia petulantly. "I don't see why anyone should be exhorted to such resounding humility! It makes the next world more important than this!"

"It's a fine passage: I don't think it does any harm to be reminded that this life is not the only one, do you?" said the Professor tentatively.

"P'raps not. But to carry out what Thomas à Kempis says one would have to go into a convent. I should hate that! I believe in facing life, and not escaping from it."



"Then you don't believe in a life of prayer and contemplation? Monks and nuns think their prayers will save sinners."

"It's complacent to think anyone's prayers are so important to a God of love who has already died to save sinners. I can't bear the idea of surrender! Does it appeal to you?"

"It's certain that none of us can hope to improve on the greatest of all surrenders; but I think there is something fine in sharing the burden of the Cross. I doubt if one can go far without coming to this conclusion. I'm inclined to think we should look to something beyond ourselves, since we've been given incommunicable lives."

"If I thought *that* was true I shouldn't care to live! Surely, beloved Professor, you don't think we can do *nothing* for each other?"

"You mustn't push me to logical conclusions. I believe we can do a great deal, but only by yielding ourselves, as Thomas à Kempis says."

After this neither of them spoke.

"Tell me, Professor," said Octavia suddenly; "do you think it wrong to feel a great need to love, and be loved?"

"No, I don't; but if you make a collection of your own emotions you may alienate yourself from the emotions of other people. Too much need of loving may exclude you from a perfect understanding."

"But, dearest Professor, I find the indifference to either needing or giving love is what makes people so obtuse . . ."

"Dearest child," he said, interrupting her, "you cannot live on the urgency of your own emotions."

They walked on in silence. It was dark and cold before they got in.

Robin had not exchanged a sentence alone with Octavia all day and was irritated at seeing her attention entirely concentrated on the Professor. He had an undefinable feeling that she had changed since his last visit. She seemed less childlike: her conversation was more mature.

## OCTAVIA

After a dinner at which he had spoken little, he went up to her :

"You're tired, I hear. Is it true what Bill says, that you want us all to come and say good night to you in your bedroom ?"

"Yes—why ?" said Octavia, looking at him with surprise.

"Your Professor will hardly approve of that, will he ?"

"D'you mean he'll think it's improper ?" asked Octavia.

"Well—let us say, unusual," he replied.

Octavia could only imagine that he was upset ; it was inconceivable that Robin should be shocked. Realizing that she had neglected him for the Professor, and not wishing to hurt his feelings, she said rather shyly :

"Are you vexed with me for suggesting that you should come and say good night to me ?"

"Vexed is hardly the word," he replied.

"P'raps you'd rather not come," she said a little anxiously.

"I ?" he said. "I shall certainly not come !"

"I won't discuss your reason for refusing now, but we'll talk to-morrow. You'll . . ."

"Aren't you going to bed, Octavia ?" said Mrs. Daventry across the room. "You look worn out, darling."

"You're quite right, Mrs. Daventry. We've had the devil of a day !" said Dick. "Even I feel done to a turn."

"Will you come and say good night to me, Professor, and bring my Commonplace Book with you ?" said Octavia slowly, and in a clear voice.

"I will," said the Professor.

Octavia's bedroom was characteristic of herself. The walls were hung with sporting prints, and above her bed was a wooden figure of the Virgin with Christ in her arms and a group of children clinging to the draperies of her skirts. Next to this was the picture of a lady in a tight riding-habit and top-hat jumping a fence by the side of a hound. Under it was written "In the Shires." A crucifix was hanging on a curtain above the fireplace, and a skull upon a bracket



was over her *prie-Dieu*. The shutters of her window had been removed to make space for book-shelves ; and between comfortable arm-chairs and a large sofa, books and music were piled upon the floor.

The Professor stayed with Octavia after her mother and brothers had left the room.

"Robin Compton thought you would think it improper to come to my bedroom to-night," said Octavia. "Can you imagine anything more absurd ! The fact is, hunting people are terribly conventional !"

The Professor did not answer.

"I think he was upset—somehow. I must have it out with him to-morrow," she said.

Robin's taciturnity had not been lost upon the Professor. He looked at Octavia sitting up in bed. She appeared to be in resplendent health, her eyes shining under her dishevelled hair.

"I thought you generally held levées at midnight," he said. "In the eighteenth century all the ladies of quality received in their bedrooms."

"Robin Compton seemed rather put out."

"I don't expect he was. He probably thought you were tired."

"It's a funny thing that, though I felt dead downstairs, I could talk all night now. I wonder why he minded ?"

"Perhaps he was afraid . . ."

"Beloved Professor," she said, interrupting him with a laugh, "I would love to think I was alarming ! Who has ever been afraid of me !"

"I wasn't thinking of you," he said, looking at her little radiant face. After a pause he added : "Perhaps he was afraid of himself."

. . . . .  
When Professor Horncastle left the next day, Octavia retired to a room on the ground floor where she was sure no one would interrupt her. It was a disused schoolroom

where, not long before, she and Dick had been accustomed to race through their scrappy lessons. Mrs. Daventry, passing on the lawn below, saw her sitting in the window-sill, reading. Returning later from her favourite pastime of pinching green-fly off the sago-palm, she found Octavia in the same position.

"My dear child! you've been sitting hunched up and showing your legs with that book for two hours. Hadn't you better go out? It's such a lovely day. What is it that's so absorbing?"

Octavia tugged her tweed skirt over her long legs.

"All right, mama! I'm going to ride with Mr. Compton over the fences directly, but I just want to finish 'Tristram Shandy.'"

"Is it a good book? Would I like it?"

"I don't think it's your sort, but it interests me tremendously. It's the book your friend who has the famous garden thought was too old for me; but he said it was a masterpiece."

Mrs. Daventry raised her eyebrows.

"As it's beyond your age, why do you go on with it? If you don't take care, you will get out of the way of taking advice till you are too old to profit by it."

"But, mama!—how is one to know the right age for anything? I'm always being told I'm too young or too old for the things I want to do. Papa says people should *try*, and *do*, and *see everything* in life."

"Your father often says foolish things. He's impressionable, and led away by the impulse of the moment. You should pay no attention to him."

At this Octavia put her book away and left the room.

Mrs. Daventry wondered if Octavia understood the books she read, and whether it was good for a girl to know much before she was married. There were some subjects she felt she must leave alone because Octavia was not a person whose intimacy could be forced, and she dreaded a collision with



her daughter's sharp and ardent mind. Octavia was a person to whom you could not hint things. If you once began talking intimately with her, she wanted everything thrashed out, and her mother did not feel equal to this sort of discussion. Mrs. Daventry was not worldly, but she was cautious. She had a strong belief that people should be persuaded rather than governessed, that action should be deferred and impulses repressed. The important thing was that the world should remain in ignorance of what you were really like ; and life, if kept at a sufficient distance, need never be challenged.

The door opened and Robin Compton interrupted her reflections.

"Where's Octavia been all the morning ?" he asked. "She was going to ride with me."

"I'm sorry to say she's been reading. Don't you think it's a mistake, Mr. Compton, for a young girl to read so much ? Octavia has always been allowed to have her own way in everything ; she reads the strangest books ! I am often perplexed to know if my husband is right in giving her so much freedom. In my young days we did not read books beyond our comprehension."

"Octavia is seventeen, isn't she ?"

"You would hardly guess it, but she is. The truth is she is both very young and very old for her age," said Mrs. Daventry.

"But if she doesn't understand the books she reads they can't do her much harm, can they ?"

"You never can tell. I am certain she knows little or nothing about life ; I would not like ideas to be put into her head. When I say this, she flares up and asks how she can learn anything if ideas are not to be put into her head. It is all very difficult."

"I suppose it's hard for mothers to know how much to tell their girls before they marry ; most parents think where ignorance is bliss it's folly to be wise."

## OCTAVIA

"Perhaps you are right. Octavia is certainly ignorant. Some time ago, after reading—I really forget what—I think a volume of French memoirs, she asked me: 'Don't Queens have mistresses as well as Kings?' What would you have said? It was most embarrassing."

"You think she knows nothing?" said Robin.

"I am positive. I sometimes think I ought to tell her; but my husband always says the same thing when I make any such suggestion," said Mrs. Daventry with a sigh; "he says I should be ill-advised to go into particulars on a matter of such delicacy. Luckily she isn't susceptible. Indeed, I don't think her at all womanly. At her age I know I was very different."

"I wouldn't worry about it, Mrs. Daventry. She'll know everything soon enough. After all, she's only a child—and her head's screwed on the right way. She's a marvellous rider, and I believe fox-hunting is what she needs. She puzzles her brain over too many things: this makes her find fault all round. Let me take her to England to hunt. She could stay with my friend Mrs. Brabazon, whom you liked. I would see that she was well mounted. You know me well enough to trust me to take care of her."

"Indeed, I do, Mr. Compton. I think it an excellent idea. You must try and persuade her father."

"I must go south to-night, but if you'll allow me I'll return. Tell Octavia to let me know what you and Mr. Daventry decide, and I'll buy her two good hunters."

"That would be very kind of you. You know you can come here whenever you like. I will take the first opportunity of discussing the matter with my husband."

Mrs. Daventry liked Robin Compton and thought what he said had shown insight. She had suffered herself from Octavia's censoriousness, and felt certain that the safest side of her daughter's character to encourage was her interest in horses. Always afraid of having a peculiar child, she misunderstood Octavia's thoughtfulness and variations of



humour : and what she did not understand she mistrusted. She had noticed with apprehension that in her encounters with Octavia Mr. Daventry's sympathies had of late been less with her and more with his daughter. She determined she would put Robin's proposals before him as persuasively as possible. It was obvious that her husband needed a change from his City occupations and a holiday abroad would not be easy to manage after Octavia came out.

When Mr. Daventry returned from Glasgow in the evening she laid her views upon Octavia's future before him.

Mr. Daventry was not averse to the idea, but he disliked making plans, and said it would be time enough to discuss it later. Octavia was his favourite child, and he did not believe his wife understood her. He respected her shrewdness, and her practical timidity amused him, but he had grave doubts of her as a reliable guide for Octavia.

Among the young men who fluttered round Dunross there was not one that he fancied as a son-in-law. His views upon life were simple. There was only one world that you could rely upon ; therefore it was advisable to have mammon as well as God on your side. No woman should marry her inferior, and every man should be in a position to keep his wife.

When Octavia protested that it was of no consequence which of the two had money, and that the rich married to the rich made dull couples, he invariably made the same reply :

"My dear child, you are too clever to marry an idle man. If he is in business, the last thing you would wish is that he should be a failure. He should at least have prospects, or brains enough to achieve something in life."

## CHAPTER IV

### *THE DECISION*

**B**ROUGHT up in an atmosphere of Scotch austerity, Octavia had a spiritual side to her nature which, however neglected, tugged at her like a kite at the end of a string. She could not always see it for the clouds ; but she never let go of the string. Her love of searching self-examination was almost as great as her love of excitement. In these humours she found consolation in walking on the moors, and when Robin and the Professor left Dunross she wanted to be alone.

Towards the evening she wandered up the sheep-path to where the shallow burn joined the heather. The bracken was turning and the rowans were shedding their leaves. She sat down and listened to the pewits crying overhead, and looked absently at the rabbits squatting outside their holes.

Two things haunted Octavia's mind. One was the conversation she had had with the Professor after lunching on the hill ; and the other, Robin's suggestion that she should hunt in England.

Though the Professor had spoken with moderation, she felt a reproach was implied when he warned her against the urgency of her own emotions. She wondered if he thought she was too fond of pleasure when—after quoting Thomas à Kempis—he had said it was good to be reminded that this was not the only life. She meditated on what she could do to improve her character. The trouble was she had so many



sides to her nature. Though she was certain that somewhere hidden within her there was a central deciding self, she was not sure which was the self to encourage and which the one to repress.

Turning from these reflections with the elasticity that prevented her from remaining long in any particular humour, she lit a cigarette and thought of Robin Compton. It was curious that a man of his age should have been shocked when she asked him to say good night to her in her bedroom. In some ways it was rather nice of him, but in others it was ridiculous. They must have it out as he had never misunderstood her before. She felt certain that when they met again she would have no difficulty in convincing him she was not improper. What was really remarkable was the insight he had shown when he said she needed an outlet. Her imagination took wings at the thought of hunting in England. This had been the hope and ambition of her life. Robin had told her so much about his adventures in the hunting field—his horses, his accidents, the long rides home and the joy of being alone with hounds! She saw herself riding marvellous horses over enormous fences in his company, and the thought of it thrilled her.

Walking home in the twilight she could think of nothing but how she could persuade her parents to let her hunt. She could not sleep for love of life.

Mrs. Daventry had come to the conclusion that the Professor's influence over Octavia was making her too old for her age, and was more upsetting than the comradeship of a boy like Dick or the veiled flirtation with Robin Compton, neither of which were likely to develop. They were friendships that were echoes of her youth: she understood them.

One day, alone with her husband, she returned to the project of Octavia's hunting.

"I don't quite like Octavia's devotion to the Professor. Though he's very civil, I'm never sure if he's serious. He has such a strange way of looking at things: I don't think he

## THE DECISION

has a good influence over Octavia. She needs a change of ideas. As I told you, Mr. Compton thinks we should let her hunt with the Brabazons. He will be there himself this winter, and if she stayed at St. Mildred's she would be well looked after. I formed a high opinion of Mrs. Brabazon in our short acquaintance at Malvern. If Octavia went to England you could take me to Cannes. I'm sure the change would do you good. You've often told me not to thwart Octavia, so I think you would be better advised to let her go. She has a good head and rides well. I see no reason why we should oppose her wishes."

"I think you're quite wrong, my love. Since Octavia has known the Professor she's a changed creature. Don't you observe how often she puts that cheeky young cub Dick in his place, and how quick she is in all she says? Why, she's twice as clever, and not a whit less keen than she was before. It's not good for any girl to be a heroine to so many stupid youths. We should all see what we can of different people in life; and who can doubt Professor Horncastle is superior to most of the people we know? I like him: he knows a lot about Art."

"You always think people know a lot about Art if they admire your pictures; I think Mr. Compton is quite as clever and more diverting than Octavia's Professor," replied Mrs. Daventry.

"Robin Compton! My dear, he's a regular flat-catcher!"

"I have no idea what that may mean," said Mrs. Daventry, raising her eyebrows, "but I find him agreeable. He knows how to behave, and has seen a lot of life. Octavia will not go far wrong if she encourages him."

"Octavia and Robin Compton!! Good God! I can't imagine a more ill-suited couple!" ejaculated Mr. Daventry.

"You only say that because he has no prospects," replied his wife.

"Really, my love, you are talking sad rubbish. I say it



because Compton is an idler. He is seventeen years older than she is, and might be any age! Luckily Octavia is a sensible girl and isn't likely to lose her head over Robin Compton or any other man."

A few days after this Octavia wrote to Robin. She was more intimate with him on paper than she was when they were together. Though she always called him "Mr. Compton," she thought it too stiff for the beginning of a letter and preferred starting without a name:

*I wish I was half as certain as you seem to be about everything in life. But you are wrong this time—I missed you. I had a bad time yesterday riding to meet the boys for lunch. The wind was wrong, and the drives changed, so I went past the new butts and got in the way of the guns. You should have heard papa swear!—He's always furious when he's frightened. "Why you aren't dead, God only knows!!" he shouted. He went on about it all through lunch. I told him he was making much ado about nothing; and quoted Beatrice: "There was a star danced, and under that was I born," at which he got angrier than ever. "Bother Beatrice" he said. "Octavia, do you hear?—I forbid you ever to do it again." (Things must be going badly in the City!)*

*When you said that one day I might perhaps fall in love and this would change all my theories, you were right: I have fallen in love. I'm madly in love with Mr. Darcy. He has ten thousand pounds a year and is haughty, reserved and fastidious. He has an old place called Pemberley—in Derbyshire—full of pictures of his ancestors. He has once been seen riding down a street, otherwise he can hardly be called sporting. If you had told me I would ever be in love with a man who didn't hunt, I would have said it was unthinkable!*

*My hunting prospects are better. The parents think of going to Cannes, and mama and I are in blissful agreement that nothing will save papa but a complete change. I overheard mama say: "It's too late to oppose Octavia now. You should*



## THE DECISION

*have thought of it before. I'm afraid she will never improve."* At which papa—(bless him!)—said: "Oh, she's all right if you let her have her head." Do you agree? Ought I to be allowed to have my head?

*Later: Glorious news! Papa says I may have two good hunters.*

*Yours, as you know,  
Octavia.*

Puzzled over who Mr. Darcy could be, but not wishing to show either ignorance or curiosity, Robin Compton answered Octavia:

*I shall make it my business to see every dealer in Ireland, and as soon as possible let you know the result. Darcy sounds the very man for you! Haughty—rich—and I suppose silent, strong, and self-suppressed. . . . What more could a woman want? I shall be thrilled to meet any man who has been successful where I have been defeated. May God give more power to his elbow—as they say over here—for he will certainly need it.*

*Yours,  
Robin Compton.*

In spite of having foreseen that what Octavia desired was certain to be conceded, Professor Horncastle was uneasy when he received her letter telling him that she was going to leave home for the first time. Neither her parents nor her friends knew much about the Brabazons to whose care she was to be committed; and her youth, impetuosity and courage, combined with the lack of discipline in her upbringing, might, he feared, involve her in difficulties.

He had always contrived in his correspondence with Octavia to conceal advice under a veil of banter. He dreaded lest the sight of his letters—easily recognized by the distinction of the handwriting—might awaken in her a suspicion that they would contain counsel not to her liking,

and which, with the intolerance of youth, she would reject. Not wishing to damp her enthusiasm or check her confidence, he took refuge in irrelevant matters, and confined his reply to criticisms upon the books she told him she had been reading.

*I am pleased to hear you have been enjoying "Pride and Prejudice." What is so remarkable about Jane Austen is her detachment from herself. In spite of the fashion of the day for authors to keep up a running commentary upon their own creations, she always allows them to speak for themselves; and without effort, and with no more than a very little exaggeration they remain throughout the book one and the same person. Could anything be better than what Mr. Bennet says when his eldest daughter goes to fetch her mother's tea? The family, you will recollect, were harassed at the time by Lydia's elopement with Wickham; and exasperated by his wife's vulgarity, vapours, and lack of self-restraint, Mr. Bennet exclaims:*

*"This is a parade which does one good; it gives such an elegance to misfortune! Another day I will do the same; I will sit in my library, in my nightcap and powdering gown, and give as much trouble as I can; or perhaps I may defer it till Kitty runs away."*

*"I am not going to run away," said Kitty fretfully. "If I should ever go to Brighton, I would behave better than Lydia."*

*"You go to Brighton! I would not trust you so near it as Eastbourne for fifty pounds! No, Kitty, I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it. No officer is ever to enter my house again, or even to pass through the village. Balls will be absolutely prohibited, unless you stand up with one of your sisters. And you are never to stir out of doors till you can prove that you have spent ten minutes of every day in a rational manner."*

*I could quote endless examples showing how all her characters keep their colour however much the events may differ upon which their conversation has to turn.*



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*Do you know the passage in Marcus Aurelius in which he says we must all keep our colour? I read it to console me in some measure for your flitting. I do not believe, whatever may befall you, that you will change your colour. For the moment the approach of winter looks dark, and the Lammermuirs have not the same allurements; so you will understand my signing myself,*  
*Your drab Professor.*

*P.S. Before you leave, I hope I may have an opportunity of saying good-bye, and discussing with you your new adventure; but if you have no time, you must write often and fully of your doings, or I shall feel isolated and far away. I will send you some books, which you must read when you are not riding. I don't think you know Matthew Arnold's prose. He is a robust and interesting critic, and I am sure you would enjoy his work. You might try "Richard Feverel." Meredith thinks he has made an epigram when he has made a conundrum, but you might like him. Froude's "Short Studies" and Boswell's "Johnson," will keep you occupied till Christmas. Do not let your fancy, or your horses, or anyone else run away with you.*

The Dunross household was full of excitement at the news that Octavia was going away with Jenkins and Merlin to hunt in England; and while Mr. Daventry was not quite happy about it, his temperament prevented him from brooding long over anything. The brothers were planning to go away after Christmas, and their mother—when not busy over preparations for her daughter's comfort—was giving her advice about her clothes and behaviour: cautioning her against the temptations and the perfidy of human nature.

"Jenkins hasn't got a good head, so you must give her full instructions what to put out for you. Don't wear all your best clothes at once, or you will not care to put on the old ones. I'm glad I had your dressing-jacket lined, as most people's houses are cold; draughty passages, and fires that burn up the chimney instead of into the room, are common faults in English country-houses. I find housemaids have



little sense, and never know if it's hot or cold. I don't know where I've put that prescription . . . it is for stiffness in the back. I will write to Miss Spriggins; she had a nephew who rode very hard with the Malvern harriers. I will forward it to you when it turns up. I don't know how you'll preserve your complexion!—I see a lot of advertisements of various creams, but I'm sure I don't know which of them is reliable. 'Jeunesse,' Bond Street, I'm told is good, but . . ."

"Never mind, darling. I expect one is much the same as the other," said Octavia. "I'll ask Mrs. Brabazon; she's sure to know, as Mr. Compton tells me she is good-looking and always beautifully dressed."

"If that is so, you are sure to meet a lot of men; be careful that you don't give them too much encouragement. Men don't like being run after," said her mother.

"I can't say I've found that myself, though I've often heard it said. I think in these ways men and women are much about the same. I'm quite sure you like the society of men far better than women, mama! I don't believe you've ever been intimate with a woman," said Octavia.

"There's something indelicate in appearing to seek for men's admiration. If you have to live with a woman who is attractive, she won't like you to run after her admirers . . . Ah! here is the prescription:

*Dr. Lilian Webb, the famous sportswoman, highly recommends the Delap ointment. It is the one and only cure for stiffness, backache, muscular rheumatism, glands and throat-trouble. Rub lightly with a fine towel the parts affected. Telegraphic address: Strategy. Postal address: Pipe-Wolferstan, Malvern.*

"There, darling! I'll give it to Jenkins. Now I must run to papa and tell him they've reserved the apartments facing south."

If the household was excited, Octavia's happiness knew

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no bounds. She lay awake for hours, her thoughts revolving like a squirrel in a cage over her journey, her hosts, her horses and her riding-habits. She collected piles of books, photographs of the family, her Bible and her Commonplace Book, and gave them to her maid to pack.

After inspecting her clothes and giving final instructions to her groom, she could think of nothing left for her to do. Careful preparations for any event are apt to leave the last days singularly empty, and Octavia was too excited to concentrate her mind upon anything except her immediate future.

Three days before her journey she was sitting on a sofa; looking out of the window of her boudoir.

It was a pearly November day characteristic of the Border country. Fine rain veiled part of the landscape and here and there brilliant sunshine illuminated the moors. A thin line of smoke could be seen going up from the gardeners' bothies, and the burn leading to the far-shepherds' cottage shone like a silver riband. Scarlet and lemon maple trees were shedding their leaves and a silver mist was rising from the ground.

The door opened and Dick came into the room. For the last few months he had not been happy. He felt that Octavia was growing up, and perceived that she was not only moving away from their joyous companionship, but forming friendships of which he did not approve.

He made up his mind he would have one frank, final, and perfect talk with Octavia.

She moved to make room for him upon the sofa.

"We'll go and say good-bye to all the old people," she said. "And I must try and see the Professor before I go. I may break my neck with the Harbington. Who knows? After all, I've never seen a fox or a hound in my life; and though Tatts jumps well, I don't suppose he's got the scope of an Irish hunter. I do wish I could have had one day with a provincial pack before starting in such a



fashionable country ! Merlin says it's all right ; but he's an optimist."

" I'd never have said that. I think he often takes a gloomy view of life ; and he's not far wrong," said Dick dejectedly.

" I mean an optimist about my riding, of course. I do wish Robin Compton could have come here to give me a few tips before I go to England," said Octavia, unable to get away from her own reflections.

" I should have thought you would have enough of him, since he's going to St. Mildred's almost as soon as you get there," retorted Dick.

Not wishing to open a discussion upon Robin, Octavia said :

" Then you think I shall be all right, do you ? Anyway, Dick, you'll write to me, won't you ? "

" A lot you'll care whether I or anyone else writes when you get to England ! What can I tell you of interest from a three-legged stool in a bank. You forget I'm starting in the ' Mummery and Middlesburgh ' next week."

" Never mind, old man, we'll be together at Christmas ; and I'll write screeds telling you about all my falls. I'm told there's a way of falling which you can learn if you take trouble."

" Who told you any such rubbish ? "

" It's not rubbish ! " said Octavia. " Mr. Compton told me."

" Robin Compton has broken every bone in his body, so I don't know what he means by learning to fall."

" Anyone else would have been killed. He's the best possible example of his own theories. He has broken all his bones as you say, and he's not even disfigured ! "

" Good God ! You don't mean to say you call him good-looking ? "

" 'Praps *not* ; but he has a wonderful figure and moves like a panther."

Octavia had hardly finished her sentence when her maid came in with a telegram :



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*Arrive to-morrow morning. Please order something to meet  
nine train. Must leave next day.*

*Robin Compton.*

"Blast!" said Dick when Octavia gave him the telegram

"Come, Dick! you know you always love his stories about hunting. He gave you 'The Girl in the Brown Habit.' He's very fond of you. D'you know he told me once he thought . . ."

"I don't want to hear what he said! I don't like Compton. He's a chap who only thinks of himself."

"Would you say he thought more about himself than either you or I do?" said Octavia pensively.

"How can you say that! You know perfectly well I never think of anyone but you. Robin Compton thinks of no one but himself."

"I would hardly say that," said Octavia.

"No! I don't suppose *you* would! But everyone else would. He never lifts a finger to help anyone, or does a stroke of work. God only knows what he *does* do!" exclaimed Dick.

"I agree: I often wonder myself. But I imagine there are a lot of men like him."

"I imagined you thought there was no one in the world like Robin!"

"Then you imagined wrong. There are heaps of people who do nothing," replied Octavia with asperity.

"I remember the time when you were down upon fellows who did nothing. Now you seem to admire them!"

"Does Robin Compton think I admire him? If he does I fear he's living in a fool's paradise," replied Octavia, getting up.

"No one knows what a man like Compton thinks. But I don't blame him for thinking you admire him. I've never observed anything in your manner likely to undeceive him. But if what you say is true, I can only pity him!"

"Do you?—I envy him. He's gay and untroubled ; falls in love with difficulty, and out of it with ease. He has the best of manners and the best of horses, and he's fond of me ! What more can you want !"

"I don't believe you. I'm perfectly certain he's the sort of chap that falls in love easily."

Octavia stretched out her hand.

"Hardly a compliment if you think he's in love with me. Don't be silly, Dick ! You know perfectly well that I'm devoted to you and not likely to change. As dear mama would say, I never improve ! Let's go out."

"We've not had much of a talk, have we, Octavia ?" said Dick plaintively, feeling he had mismanaged what was to have been his frank, final, and perfect talk.

"Oh, don't worry ! We'll talk later. We might ride over the new fences. I shall take Tatts to St. Mildred's to ride to the meets. Don't you think they'll admire him ?"

"Oh, yes, he's an absolute clinker. At a pinch, you could take him out hunting," replied Dick, following her out of the room.

When Octavia went to bed that night she pondered over this conversation. She asked herself if her manner to Robin had been such as to give him the idea she admired him ? How could Dick talk such nonsense ! If it had been so her mother would have pointed it out at once . . . perhaps she had noticed it ; that was why she said men didn't like being run after. Robin was nothing more to her than a delightful out-of-door companion. He had taught her to ride, and got her invited to St. Mildred's ; it would have been strange if she did not feel grateful. Dick knew nothing. How could he understand a man of the world like Robin Compton ? She liked seeing anything well done ; she admired his way of moving and his ease of manner ; it was not *him*, but his advice, she wanted. There was nothing spiritual about Robin ; she felt sure he had never given life or death a thought ; nor would he have listened to or understood one



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word of the conversation she had had walking home on the heather. But then, there was no one like the Professor! He belonged to the great of God's earth, and supplied quite another need in her nature. She could not conceal from herself that when she was with Robin—in spite of his shortcomings—she always felt a sort of excitement. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake if he thought she admired him, and a duty to undeceive him. She must check that touch of ascendancy she had noticed in his manner. He must not treat her like a child.

Determined to show more dignity, Octavia fell asleep. On waking, the thoughts of the previous night returned, and she made up her mind she would show Robin as much indifference as possible. Instead of greeting him upon his arrival she would remain in her bedroom.

Pleased with this idea, she wrote a note to say she was tired and would not be down before eleven.

"Tell Pope to give this to Mr. Compton when he arrives," she said to her maid; "and turn on my bath."

She lay back listening to the gardener raking the gravel, satisfied that she had done the right thing. But when she heard the sound of the motor in the courtyard she regretted her action. Irritated with herself and her maid, she jumped out of bed and hurried to the bathroom.

Octavia took infinite trouble over her toilette. She tied and untied the ribbon in her hair several times before she was satisfied that the bow was in the right place, and discarded skirts and jerseys were strewn about the room.

When she had finished dressing it was ten by the stable clock. What could she do to while away the time? . . . anything rather than go down too early. Her plans had so upset her nerves that she feared that when she saw Robin she would be unable to conceal her delight.

After all, had it been worth while? She had a suspicion that her tactics had had a more punitive effect upon herself than upon the object they were intended for.



After scrutinizing herself in the looking-glass, she left her bedroom, banging the door behind her. Mrs. Daventry was in the morning-room examining the flower-vases. Octavia tried to conceal her surprise at finding her mother alone.

"What has become of Robin Compton?" she asked.

"I think he's gone out."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"I really don't remember; but if you're going to the garden, tell Paterson to come and speak to me. He arranges the flowers so badly! Just look at this catly! and this lovely . . ."

"But, mama, can't you remember what he said? Did he think I was ill?" replied Octavia, with apprehension.

"Why didn't he wait for me? He knows I always get up early."

"Well, now you mention it, he did say something about going to the beech walk. By the by, darling, I've got a message for you which Paterson's stupid way of arranging flowers had nearly made me forget. Dick said he would be out all day. Surely Mr. Compton's paying a very short visit. He tells me he's leaving us to-morrow and that he . . ."

Octavia did not wait to hear the rest of the sentence.

Bareheaded and with a beating heart, she ran in the direction of the beech wood.

The blackbirds were piping in the bushes and the late swallows following one another in changing patterns. Winter had come, and except among the silver firs there was no shelter in the leafless woods. All the little birds seemed to call to her with their shrill and sudden notes as she made her way like a solitary arrow towards the seat at the end of the beech walk.

If Robin had had any doubts about Octavia's health they were dispelled at her approach. Bashful and breathless, she ran up to him. Meeting the challenge of her eyes, he observed her emotion, and felt a pang at the distance that

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not only his years, but his life, had put between him and so much youth and beauty.

With a lovely laugh she held out her hand.

"Oh! Mr. Compton! how could you go so far? We might have missed each other all the morning, and think what that would have meant to me!"

"Would it have meant much to you?" he said, taking no notice of her proffered hand. She saw with apprehension that she had offended him. He lit a cigar and threw the match over his shoulder. Her resolve to show dignity was weakening, but she answered as coolly as she could:

"Of course it would! This is a business visit and you're going away to-morrow. There's not much time for you to tell me all the things I want to know, is there?"

She tried to forget her morning's manœuvres. Sitting down very close to him, she said in her most cajoling manner:

"You were shocked last time you were here. You must explain to me why later on; but now we'll talk of nothing but delicious things. Tell me about Mrs. Brabazon. You know her very well, don't you? Will she like me? Is she pretty! Is she nice?"

"*Nice* is hardly the word. Some people think she's pretty. I expect she'll like you, and I'm sure you'll like her as you're an idealist."

"You mean, I suppose, that I shall exaggerate the impression she'll make upon me?"

"No; that's not what I mean. She is more likely to exaggerate the effect she thinks she has made upon you," said he.

"You think she's confident and fancies herself, and doesn't really know what people are thinking, do you?"

"I wouldn't say that either. She generally knows to a hair what other people are thinking; and as far as fancying herself—most women do that, don't they?"

"I wonder . . . ?" said Octavia. After a pause she continued: "Do *I* fancy myself?"



"I've never noticed anything to make me suppose the contrary," he answered with deliberation.

"Do you mean to say you think I'm vain?" she exclaimed.

"Perhaps not vain, but full of self-confidence, I should say."

"What a horrible person you must think me! Over-confidence is intolerable; but it's not true—I'm fundamentally humble!"

"God forbid! I hate humility: it isn't made for this world!" he exclaimed.

"Humbleness and humility are totally different."

"Now you're getting clever, and you know how little I appreciate clever people."

"I've never seen anyone more intolerant of stupidity than you—and for a man who isn't clever it has always amazed me!" said Octavia, relieved at the turn the conversation was taking.

"Then you don't think I'm clever?" he said, throwing away his cigar.

"You surely don't want me to think you what you hate! You always say you want me to like you," said Octavia.

"I'm afraid I must have misled you. It is not your liking that I want," he said, turning slowly and looking into her eyes.

Noticing with precision the exact effect these words made upon her, he watched the lights and shadows playing over her face. Octavia's resolution faded under the scrutiny of his eyes. Turning her head away, she said:

"Let's go to the stables. We can finish this conversation later."

Neither of them moved.

"Why didn't you meet me at the station, Octavia? I travel all the way from Ireland for one night to tell you what I can about the people you'll meet at St. Mildred's and the horses I've bought for you, and you waste half the morning



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in your bedroom. D'you call that kind? What can I have done to offend you? . . . Didn't you want me to come?"

Troubled by this question, Octavia said:

"Yes—I mean No."

"P'raps you'd like me to go? There's a train this evening, I believe. The fact is, you've changed. I've always thought—God knows why!—that you were different to other women . . . more candid, more . . ."

"Please, please, don't go on! You know quite well I'm grateful. What can you want me to say?" said Octavia, dropping her head like a guilty child.

Robin listened in silence. Then, feeling the warmth of her little figure close to his own, he bent his head to look under the veiled lids of her lovely eyes, and with a sudden impulse lifted her chin and kissed her.

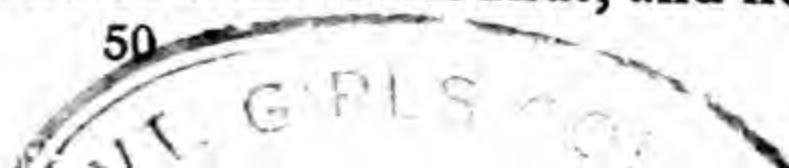
## CHAPTER V

### *THE BRABAZONS*

THERE were two famous packs of foxhounds where the Brabazons lived, and though the country they hunted over was different in character they both attracted large fields of ardent pursuers.

Harbington—where Robin Compton had decided that Octavia was to make her entry into the sporting world—was a moderate-sized manufacturing town with a fine old market square where men interested either in cattle or politics were wont to assemble ; but from lack of enterprise the factories were not in a flourishing condition. The thoughts of the inhabitants were entirely concentrated upon the hunting world and what they could get out of it. In spite of its chimneys, and the shrill whistle that called the men to their work, Harbington was a quiet place and had long been considered the most desirable, as it was the most respectable centre for anyone who wished not merely to jump and to gallop, but to study the science of fox-hunting. The country was wild and undisturbed ; except for negligible patches it was all grass, and it carried a good and holding scent. In parts it was hilly and divided by unjumpable bottoms with which the more experienced sportsmen seldom meddled, as, unless you got away on good terms with hounds, it was not worth risking your horse's back and your own neck to find the oldest and least enterprising subscriber in front of you.

No huntsman could interfere with his hounds, and no field



could over-ride them when they met in the hilly parts of the Harbington ; and the foxes were so wild that they had been known to run for two hours before they escaped or were killed.

The drawbacks of this from a horseman's point of view were as obvious as the advantages to a hound-man's ; and it became the fashion for the followers of the Harbington—who from safe distances seldom lost sight of the hunt—to censure the hard-riding and younger men who joined them every week from the neighbouring districts.

"I can't think why that infernal fellow jumped the timber ! . . . hounds weren't even running . . . stupid ass ! He ought to have been laid out for dead," one would say.

"And did you see Smithson—that they all think such a hero in the Bragg—jump the stile when even Haycock was going through the gate ? He jolly nearly came to grief and was within an ace of jumping on the hounds. I was more than pleased when his swagger was met by all the Coventry curses," said another.

"And fancy going down to the Rushingford brook at a place where no one has ever been known to jump it ! Anyone with an ounce of sense would have followed us down the road. To think he got over after all ! I wonder who the coward was that put down the bridge. If we'd known *that*, none of us would have been left. I must say those champagne fellows from Dashington have luck !"

The editor of the local sporting paper would have been outraged had anyone suggested he should enumerate by name those of the field who had distinguished themselves. He was content to chronicle without comment the course pursued by the fox, and rarely allowed himself to give more than a hint as to which of the subscribers had been conspicuous ; or, to quote from their eloquent correspondent, "were in at the death."

There was an atmosphere of gentility and reserve in the Harbington country denied to its more fashionable neigh-



bour—the town of Dashington—and the stationary proprietors of the country houses near St. Mildred's read with pained and avid curiosity in the *Field*, the misadventures, gallantry, and successes of the followers of the Bragg every other day with their morning coffee.

It was noticeable to the more observant, that the two packs of hounds had taken on themselves something of the complexion of the field by whom they were followed. The Harbington—owned for generations by Sir Guy Coventry and his brother—were unexcitable and old-fashioned. They were a serious pack, trained and bred by an admirable and conscientious huntsman. Haycock had a round smile, a red face, and imperturbable patience and good humour. He would rather have had a blank day than permit either his hounds or himself to be deflected by any "Halloa," and considered it both his duty and his pleasure to draw towards the most impenetrable woodlands on the days when special trains had been chartered to convey strangers to the more popular of the Harbington meets. If any of his hounds were indiscreet enough to hunt singly, or run ahead of their fellows, his eye marked them out for destruction, and the offending animal was either hanged, sold, or disposed of. Never hurried or over-ridden by the circumspect field, they earned the reputation of pursuing a cold scent after a long day with the unflagging persistence of detectives.

The Bragg hounds that hunted the Dashington country were very different. Gay, friendly, and erect, they would watch with wagging sterns and heads on one side the regiment of horses that were gathering from every part of the country; but the most cajoling endeavours of the most foolish in the field could not distract their attention from the bronze-like figure of their huntsman. Well marked and thin-skinned, they were bred for speed and had their ears cocked for the faintest "Halloa." Neither Vince nor his master were hampered by any of the scruples inherited in the Harbington. Their idea was to show sport and to catch the

fox rather than to hunt him : it was with reluctance that they approached thick and unpopular coverts.

The thin skins of the overbred pack resented the pricks of holding gorse, and Jack Cuthbert—the Master—did not care to expose his hounds oftener than he could help to the criticism of drawing in Indian file.

It was whispered by the spiteful that he arranged his whips with the skill of the captain of an eleven outside these particular coverts : that suddenly and without warning, a silver "Halloa" would ring through the air, releasing the hounds from their ordeal ; and Vince would gallop at racing speed, closely followed by the whole pack towards the most reliable withy-bed in the country. Whether this was accurate or not it was hard to say, but it was perplexing to the least malicious to hear of the wonderful runs enjoyed by the Bragg on days when the coldness of the scent had made sport impossible with any other hounds.

However much the Master might lay himself open to criticism there were no two opinions about the huntsman. Vince was a man who in any circumstances, whether he had been a lawyer, a lecturer, or a man of letters, could not have failed to make a mark. Most people were afraid of him, and however complacently the youngest men behind the biggest cigars addressed him at the chilly meets out cub-hunting, they felt instinctively as the season advanced that their confidence was likely to be undermined, if not shattered by his glassy imperturbability. Not that Vince had bad manners, or a bad temper ; he was irreproachably courteous to the swells, the farmers, the strangers and the stragglers ; more than that, he was quoted, worshipped and extolled by everyone who hunted with him ; but with perfect knowledge, as well as an unerring instinct, he had measured the precise distance between himself and the rest of the field, and in a mysterious and undefined way they read at every advancing step, "No trespassers allowed." The only person he really cared for was his Master ; and he permitted himself no



familiarity excepting with his hounds. Between him and them there was unbroken intimacy.

He was less moved by a large field than anyone, unless it was perhaps his hounds ; of whom it might have been written :

*They could come up through a crowd of horses and stick to the line of their fox, or fling gallantly forward to recover it without a thought of personal danger or the slightest misgiving that not one man in ten is master of the two pair of hoofs beneath him, carrying death in every shoe.*

The Dashington country was in every particular different to its neighbour. With a galloping horse of staying power it was possible to go *through* the Harbington fences, but with the Bragg it was neck or nothing. Though less hilly it was far from flat, and the fences were of such a nature that they would turn a horse over like wire if he were unlucky enough to catch the top of the stake-em-bound. If anything could teach a man to gallop it would have been riding with the Bragg for a bridge-gate in the company of three or four hundred people, none of them morbidly civil. Pace was the only means of securing a start ; for, if from inadvertence you remained in the crowd and your horse had a sensitive way of backing when pressed, everyone would pass you. In any case, you would have a horse's head under each arm, a spur upon your instep, a kicker with a bow upon its tail backing against your favourite mare, your hat knocked off by an enthusiastic funkier pointing to the line the fox was taking, and your eye would grow dim and heart sink at seeing the pack crossing the ridge and furrow like swallows several fields ahead of you. If to make up for lost time you hardened your heart to jump the fence by the side of the gate, you exposed yourself to the ridicule of the field ; as it is upon these occasions that the hunter you are most accustomed to take liberties on is certain to fall upon its head.

It was a matter of endless controversy which of the coun-



tries was the more difficult to ride over, as both packs attracted large fields ; but to one gate in the Bragg there were six in the Harbington, and if caution enabled you to follow the deviations of the fox with the latter it killed all prospect of seeing a hunt with the former.

Among the best-known houses near Harbington was St. Mildred's. It was roomy, ugly, and over-upholstered. Its owners were rich, hospitable, and respected.

Colonel Brabazon was a retired Guardsman and a strong Tory. A man of single mind and little imagination, when not fox-hunting he would dilate with platitudinous eloquence upon Imperialism, and the deterioration that he had seen taking place under his own eyes in the political life of his country. He could not have been mistaken for anything but an Englishman whether you had met him in the Ural Mountains or the Solomon Islands. A typical soldier—he was accustomed to giving orders and having his orders obeyed.

Mrs. Brabazon was heartless, lazy and kind. She had long been the barometer upon all subjects—whether fashion, literature, or sport—by which the families round Harbington had set their opinions ; nor could any of them imagine challenging her decisions upon matters either of morals or etiquette. Her voice was musical, and so gentle that people were constrained to pull their chairs closer to listen to her conversation ; an action they were the more emboldened to take as she was not only fascinating to look at, but a habit of exaggerated concentration gave the most commonplace remark that could be addressed to her an air of importance. She was easily amused, plausible, and capable of infinite self-deception. A long practice of social ascendancy had given her complete mastery over herself ; but what might have savoured of confidence in her manner was counteracted by a puzzled contraction of her brows over the transparent grey of two questioning eyes. No one could lift her long lashes as slowly or drop them as quickly as Jessica Brabazon ;

and though, if you were watching, you would observe the same expression levelled at her ham and eggs, the puzzled habit of her lovely eyes had stood her in good stead upon more than one occasion.

Married at the age of eighteen to a man inferior in intelligence and lacking in charm, her early flirtations had met with little understanding, and had ultimately clashed with his inarticulate jealousy. While rallying him with semi-injured, always lively good humour in private, Mrs. Brabazon treated her husband with deference in public. Always anxious to provide for his leisure, she encouraged his sense of public duty ; listened to what he was doing upon the County Council or intended to do about Colonial Preference ; and with persistent industry had distracted his attention and smiled away his confidence. The frictions of their early married life had been smuggled out of sight ; and though in a dumb way Colonel Brabazon knew his wife was deceiving him, the knowledge led him in no particular direction. As he had been worsted in every encounter they had ever had, he had ceased to challenge or question her.

Frictions that are smuggled and not fought out are wont to reappear, and shortly before the day Octavia was to arrive the Colonel had taken exception to his wife's intimacy with the Master of the Harbington hounds. Sir Guy Coventry was his oldest friend, and though they seldom engaged in conversation there was an understanding between them which had dated from their private school days, where they had suffered from the same incapacity to concentrate, and had shared the delicacies sent in hampers by their parents.

Sir Guy was the most desirable, as he was the most unassailable *parti* in the county. He was a big fine man of slow intelligence, no education, and abrupt address ; who concealed under an arrogant manner a guileless simplicity. He and his brother had inherited the hounds from their grandfather ; and lived in the large and comfortless mansion of Stanton Starkey, presided over by their mother.



Lady Julia Coventry was an old lady who had come of aristocratic and gambling parentage. She had lived all her life in the heart of the racing world, and had acquired from habit and observation a complete knowledge, not only of that world, but of the lives and temptations of her fellow-creatures. Racing people have more insight than is commonly found among fox-hunters. Men and women who spend five days out of seven in pursuing the fox, looking for hunters half the summer, and shooting or fishing all the autumn, are usually of limited intelligence. They read the same newspapers, use the same language, make the same criticisms, do the same things, meet the same people, and perceive the same objects all the year round. The racing world is composed of more complicated elements; and the hazards of breeding and fluctuations of fortune involved in a career upon the Turf add an excitement to life far exceeding the dangers of fox-hunting.

Lady Julia had been a hard rider in her day, and there was nothing she did not know about the characters of the neighbours who rode with the Harbington. She had ceased to go out in the world either of society or racing, and, while superior in intelligence to her sons, was determined to devote what remained to her of life to their pleasure and comfort. Orderly and punctilious, she had encouraged her eldest son to form habits from which it was difficult if not impossible to imagine the smallest departure. From his earliest years Sir Guy had had his own chair, whether in the billiard-room, morning-room, or library; and if his dog was not lying on it there was always someone to warn strangers not to use it. He had his own post-bag, a separate table in the hall for his cap and gloves, a separate decanter and tumbler on the dinner table, and special candles which were handed to him at the foot of the staircase when he retired to bed. As the table was always the same size whether the house was empty or full, and the guests lowered their voices when the Master came into the room, the meals were long, dull and silent.

Although everyone made up to the Master, most people were afraid of him, and, with the exception of Haycock and Colonel Brabazon, he was intimate with nobody.

In spite of Sir Guy's liking for the Colonel, he had never been known to take any interest in his wife, and when he was seen driving a buggy every Sunday afternoon to St. Mildred's and pointing out the merits of his favourite hounds to her at the meets, there was a kind of hushed excitement in the bosom of the scandalmongers. They were acclimatized to the half-hearted improprieties in the neighbourhood, but that the Master should spend his Sunday afternoons away from the kennels was as if the skies had fallen ; and when a holiday parson preaching in the well-attended parish church chose for his text :

*A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter,*

there was not a person in the congregation that was not reminded of the comings and goings between St. Mildred's and Stanton Starkey.

On the morning of the day Octavia was to arrive, Colonel Brabazon walked into his wife's bedroom. She was lying among a heap of pillows tied with ribbons, and propped against a French bed of gold canework. Above her head was a large mirror with a crucifix in the centre, and on a consol at the side of her bed there was a profusion of flowers, and several old and faded photographs. The room was full of pink and mauve hangings ; and her toilette table gleamed with coloured glass and the gold and silver fittings of her dressing-case.

Surprised at her husband's early entrance, she scanned him narrowly under her puzzled brows. Observing the severity of his expression she stretched a pleading hand out :

" Oh, Brab !—you've got the tie on that I don't like !—I do wish, darling . . . "

Though Colonel Brabazon liked his wife to notice what he



wore, he felt sure that the morning light admitted of no such observation, nor was he in a humour to talk about trifles.

"Never mind my tie!" he exclaimed with impatience. "I've got something to say to you. No one can accuse me of interfering with your life, Jessica, or of curiosity as to your movements. I think you'll admit that I've long since ceased to think or care about myself in any way; but when I see you making a fool, not only of yourself but of the Master, I feel obliged to speak. People are beginning to talk. It was ridiculous seeing you shrink up against Guy at the meet when that hound put his feet upon your habit skirt. You, who wouldn't flinch before a tiger pretending to be frightened and seeking protection from the Master!"

"Really, darling," said his wife, pulling herself up slowly and lighting a cigarette, "how can you be so foolish as to mind what people say behind one's back? We all say the same things, and will go on saying them, about each other. Life would be intolerable if our conversation had to be a reach-me-down. Personally, I only want people to say nice things to my face; and as long as they don't forget to say them I'm profoundly indifferent as to any criticism they may express behind my back. What evidence have you for thinking people are so malicious? and why do you say they're all talking? Believe me, you're merely interpreting what you're feeling yourself. Guy Coventry is by no means easy to engage in conversation. He is ultimately dull and I happen to amuse him—that's all!"

Colonel Brabazon looked at his wife, who was trying to make rings out of the smoke of her cigarette.

"Guy is too good a fellow to be made a fool of," he said. "He has little or no experience of a woman like you, or, for that matter, of any woman very much. He's a simple sort of chap and needs someone to protect him."

"You're taking the very words out of my mouth! I entirely agree with you," said his wife; adding with gravity,

"Guy needs protection: it's this that arouses a sort of maternal instinct in me, Brab."

The desire of Colonel Brabazon's life had been to have children, and as it was one that was not shared by his wife her remark grated upon him. Turning round abruptly, he walked to the fireplace. There was a moment's silence, then he said:

"I suppose it's hopeless ever to try and make you understand; but listen, Jessica . . ."

"How can you be so unkind? You've told me a hundred times that no one understands as quickly as I do," interrupted Mrs. Brabazon; "and if it's a question of Guy, the most fantastic person would hardly describe him as complicated. He's treated with religious reverence at Stanton Starkey, but he only impresses the servants' hall. Both you and I know precisely what the Master is. You know him even better than I do. Weren't you at Eton together?"

"Yes: I was his fag at Eton and one of the few people who weren't afraid of him."

"Good Heavens!" said his wife, with renewed attention. "You don't mean to say anyone was frightened of Guy!—How he must have changed! It's impossible to imagine him as a fire-eater. I can only suppose he was good with his fists. He does box, doesn't he?"

"He does; but it wasn't that," said her husband. "He was a good chap and different from the rest of us. I, for one, owe him more than I can say."

"A sort of Sir Galahad in fact," said his wife. Hoping that she had lured him away from his original intention she continued: "No one can say you haven't more than repaid anything you may owe Guy. Tell me about his boxing, Brab: it's an interesting combination, a Sullivan and a Galahad!"

"I don't know anything about Galahads," said her husband. "I only know it's my turn to do something for Guy; and when you talk of protecting him, you know perfectly



well that you're assuming a rôle you can never play. Who, I should like to ask, are you going to protect the Master from ? ”

“ Don't let's quarrel about which rôle Nature has allotted to us to play in life. I'm not at all like Desdemona and you can never be Othello ; but I gather from your conversation that I am the point of danger. It is new and *chic*, I must say, to have a husband anxious to protect men from the dangerous wiles of his wife ; but you'll forgive me if I say I suspect your motive is not wholly disinterested. I've often been told that though it's vexatious for a woman to have a husband who minds his wife's admirers, it would be more humiliating to have one who did not. I entirely dissent from this view. Perhaps I'm lacking in what the servants call ‘ proper pride ’ ; but I wish, Brab darling, for a change, you would humiliate me. I find these scenes excessively exhausting.”

Mrs. Brabazon threw a naked arm over her head and closed her eyes.

“ God knows ! I don't want to make scenes, Jessica, but I don't share your desire to be humiliated ; nor do I wish it for my friend. I've watched this thing going on for weeks and weeks, and never said one word. As far as I personally am concerned, I know you don't think it matters a curse. . . ”

“ How can you say such a thing ? ” said she in an injured voice. “ Haven't I always thought of what you wanted to do ; and been the first to suggest you should take your part in all that's of public interest ? ”

“ Don't interrupt me,” said the Colonel, with a look of determination. “ If no one else helps Guy, I will. I intend to put my foot down.”

“ Oh, darling, you're talking like a man in a novel !—Which foot—the right or the wrong ? When a man says he's going to put his foot down he ought to be sure it's the right one,” said his wife, with a playful expression in her eyes.

"*I* know—*I* know!—I was *sure* you would say just this sort of thing; but I tell you frankly I won't stand it. If you really cared for the fellow it would be different."

"Do you mean to tell me you would prefer me to be in love with . . ."

"Pray, Jessica, spare me . . . I repeat it—if you cared it would be different; but you don't, and he's too good a fellow to be made a fool of. You've got him into conspicuous habits, spending all his Sunday afternoons here. It's high time he should marry; and if you really desired his happiness instead of being merely intent on your own, you would try and find him a wife."

Stretching her arms to the ceiling and sitting up with a slow yawn, Mrs. Brabazon said:

"That's an admirable idea of yours. What about Octavia Daventry?—She might be the very girl for him!"

"I don't know about that, but Robin says she rides marvellously and will show us all the way down here."

"In that case," replied his wife, "she will see very little of the Master and will not prove the formidable rival you desire. I've never observed Guy jump a twig in his life." She looked at the watch upon her wrist and rang the bell for her maid.

"Wait a moment, Jessica," he said. "Are you going to encourage Guy to come here or not?"

"But this is Saturday, and you've just told me he only comes on Sundays. Why should he break the iron habits of a lifetime to console a poor woman for having married a jealous husband?"

Seeing Colonel Brabazon walking towards the door she stopped him:

"Before you take any risks in your new departure hadn't you better write and decline the horse Guy was going to send to Sturry Goss?" she said.

"You can do that yourself," he replied. "It's your affair and has nothing to do with me. He said he thought the



horse might suit you and it was at your suggestion he proposed that I should try it first."

"Perhaps he wants to get rid of it. Do you think the horse would really suit me, darling?" said she, looking at him with her questioning eyes.

"I know nothing whatever about it," replied her husband in a wooden voice, and turning his back, he walked to the door.

"Oh, very well! if you don't mind my breaking my neck, say so; but I've no desire whatever to be rough-rider either to you or the Master." Seeing her maid standing in the doorway Mrs. Brabazon pointed to the breakfast tray upon her lap and said: "I'm going to get up, Marie. I'll wear my blue serge. Go and tell Hawkins to order either the brougham or the motor to meet Miss Daventry at the 5.15 this afternoon."

Colonel Brabazon shut the door of his library and sat down at the writing-table. Although impenitent, he was aware that he had upon more than one occasion interfered without success in his wife's flirtations, but this last did not so much excite his jealousy as his pity, and he was determined he would stop all the talk, not by ignoring, as he had hitherto done, her visits from Sir Guy, but by associating himself with them. He sat down and wrote a note, which he sent over to Stanton Starkey:

*Saturday.*

*Dear old man,*

*You might come here in the morning to-morrow; and if you send the horse which I was to try for Jessica at Sturry Goss I would lark him over a fence or two after lunch. Haycock asked me to go to the kennels one afternoon, so I'll go back with you when we've tried the horse to-morrow.*

*Brab.*

## CHAPTER VI

### *ST. MILDRED'S*

THE memory of the morning walk in the beech wood left a deep impression upon Robin Compton ; but he did not feel altogether comfortable about it. Up till that moment he had been the master and Octavia the pupil, and the difference in their ages had been obvious and established. But by giving way to an impulse which up till then he had deliberately controlled, he was not at all sure that they had not exchanged relations.

Sitting back in the railway carriage after leaving Dunross, he cursed himself for being a fool. With anyone else it would not have mattered. He could never remember a time when a sudden impulse had not made him hold some beautiful face close to his own ; but the heads and hearts of the women he had kissed had not been permanently affected ; and he had made his escape as easily as they had from the consequences of his action. Octavia was a bird of a different plumage. Her emotions were more profound ; and her whole attitude towards life one of greater intensity. Once those emotions were aroused he felt certain he had thrown open a window which he would be powerless to shut. He made up his mind that in future he would hold himself in greater control, and regulate their intimacy to the point it had reached before the morning walk.

With these thoughts in his head he wrote Octavia a long and impersonal letter full of the instructions he had meant



to give her during his brief visit, addressing it to reach her upon her arrival at St. Mildred's.

Robin's scruples showed how little he comprehended Octavia. To her, the climax of the morning walk seemed perfectly natural; a fitting culmination to a quarrel, which, from a mistaken notion of her own, had strained their relations. Robin's kiss was a seal set upon their friendship, and a guarantee that a misunderstanding of the sort could not happen again. The matter being thus disposed of, her mind ceased to dwell upon it.

Leaning back in the train that was taking her to England, her thoughts were concentrated upon her horses, her hunting, a grass country, and the fox ahead of her; and when they strayed towards the morning walk, she felt sure that Robin would be less than human if he did not make allowances for some spontaneity at a time of such exquisite anticipation. She had no regrets; and felt no shyness. She was confident that when they met again, she would be able to regulate their intimacy to the point at which it had arrived before the morning walk in the beech wood.

She got up and examined herself in the looking-glass and wondered if her three-cornered hat was not a trifle theatrical. Robin had told her Mrs. Brabazon was clever, but not intellectual; and that she was always beautifully dressed. She wished she had asked him a little more about the Brabazons, and wondered whether he had told them about her own home and family, and what she herself was like.

Octavia was not self-conscious, but when she got out of the train, and Jenkins and a footman were fussing over the luggage, she felt a sort of hushed excitement at the idea of going into a milieu about which she knew so little.

Upon her arrival, she tripped over the head of a tiger on the floor, and noticed the stuffed trophies of Colonel Brabazon's travels hanging round the walls of the staircase. A door opened and Mrs. Brabazon came into the hall. Kissing her on both cheeks she said:

"I'm sorry my husband hasn't come in yet. The hounds met in the hills and I only hunt when they're near; I'm ashamed to say I'm a very lazy person. You must come and have tea; but before you open the door I must tell you I have two guests; young Lord Tilbury, and a delightful friend—to whom I'm longing to introduce you—Mrs. Malet. Tilbury will amuse you; he's very good-looking, and brave as a lion. He knows nothing about hounds, or indeed about anything else, but he's a delicious creature."

Mrs. Brabazon opened the door and they walked into a room hot to suffocation and entirely upholstered in leather. Upon their entrance a young man in a red coat and mud-bespattered breeches got up from the tea-table.

"Tilbury, this is my friend Miss Daventry," said Mrs. Brabazon; "and this is Mrs. Malet."

Octavia shook hands with them and sat down. Mrs. Malet turned to her and said:

"You will be tired after your journey; won't you take off your cloak? It's hot in here."

"Susan's quite right. Your red cloak is so pretty that I didn't suggest you should take it off—but it *is* hot. She looks like a person in a picture, doesn't she, with her scarlet cloak and three-cornered hat?" said Mrs. Brabazon to her guests. "Have some sardines, won't you? You've brought us luck, as it froze all last week. I can't think how the Bragg could have gone out, which I hear they did yesterday. The going was so bad here that the Master had to take the hounds home. Did you have anything of a hunt yesterday, Tilbury?"

"I should say so! We had a fizzer!—forty minutes of the best," said Lord Tilbury. "Pity you weren't out, Miss Daventry, though if you had told me the night before that we should have hunted next day, I'd have betted you a flimsy! But my man rattled back the curtains earlier than he would dare to have done if there had been a frost. Silly image! When I asked him if it was right, he said:



'Two degrees of thaw this morning, my lord,' and never said it had poured all night. Cuckoo! I'm sure I don't know what I keep him for! I got out of bed after a bit and looked out, and I'm buttered if I didn't see some of the fairies jogging along to the meet. 'William, my boy!' says I, 'this won't do. Your hack shall have the gala of galloping down the middle of the road twenty miles an hour!' To make a long story short . . ."

"Pray go on, and don't shorten any of your stories, my dear. We are all eager to hear them," said Mrs. Brabazon.

"We found in the spinney belonging to that home-cured bacon of a farmer—that fellow that cursed me for leaving the gate open—as if any of us were going to shut a door when hounds were running!"

"You mean Webster," said Mrs. Malet. "He's not a bad fellow, but his cows were let out the other day, which caused endless trouble. He always takes down the wire, and you can't say the same of some of the farmers."

"Expect you're right, Mrs. Malet; anyway there was no dawdling; we found at once, and the fox—God bless him!—headed for the finest line in the country. 'This is croquet, my boy!' says I, as Cunning Kate and I swung over a nasty stile, throwing out one or two of the Johnnies that had started with us. We ran at a fearful speed down to that damned brook. 'By the holy Moses, it's cricket!' I exclaimed as I landed with a struggle on the other side and saw Charlie making for Palmer's garden wall a field ahead of us, and as far as my excited eye could discern as tired as a tea-leaf. We had been running for forty minutes, and something is pretty sure to give way about then—the fox, the hounds, or the horses. This time, thank the Archangels!—it was pug, and we rolled him over in the open. William was not the last to Who-whoop! Mrs. Brab, I can assure you!"

Lord Tilbury leant back with a happy expression on his handsome face. Turning to Octavia, he added:

"Hope I've not bored you, Miss Daventry. We're a bit given to hunting shop down here, you know, aren't we, Mrs. Brab? The next time we meet I hope you'll be able to tell us you had my luck. I bet a pony, if you do, you'll take every advantage of it."

"No one could possibly be bored, my dear boy," said Mrs. Brabazon. "Your story was short, the humour dry, and your language so entertaining that none of us could fail to be pleased. Must you be going?—Well, we shall see you Tuesday, and if we can be of any use, say so. Stanton Starkey is so near you may like to leave your hack here."

"Are you going to hunt Tuesday, Jessica?" asked Mrs. Malet. "If not, we could drive together. If you want any cherry brandy, Miss Daventry, you'll see me driving a dog-cart and I shall be delighted to give you anything you want. I live near here, so in any case we're sure to meet soon. Good-bye."

Octavia looked at her charming old-fashioned face and said:

"I shall look forward to seeing you, Mrs. Malet; but if I come up to you Tuesday at the meet, will you recognize me, do you think?"

"Don't be afraid!—I shan't forget you."

"I'll let you know, Susan, about driving. I'm not sure what Brab will want me to do. I've been rather headachy lately, and you know how he fusses over my health!" said Mrs. Brabazon, kissing her friend.

"Good-bye, Miss Daventry, hope your horses will carry you at the top of the hunt Tuesday. It's a ripping country though a bit hilly, and there's that blasted brook!—I've had seaweed in my mouth out of every brook in the country; so I shan't give my horse the opportunity of diving any longer; but don't be put off by me. Horses new to the country always begin well, and thank the Archangels! there's very little water down here. My heart cracks at the very sight of a pollarded willow; but I expect you're



made of sterner stuff," said Lord Tilbury; and lighting a large cigar, he pressed Mrs. Brabazon's hand and left the room.

"He's a quaint creature! I delight in him, but Brab doesn't. He makes the mistake of thinking him a fool when he's only a joke."

"I thought him extremely nice," said Octavia. "Does he ride well?"

"They all say he does, but his courage is greater than his discretion. He has a great deal of fun for his money; there's something gay and jolly about him which I like. I adore vitality, don't you? But I needn't ask! You look as if you had never had a sorrow in your life. Are you ever out of spirits?"

"Oh, yes; but not for long. You see, I've had a very happy life."

"You've hardly begun your life, my dear. You're surely very young, aren't you?"

"I'm seventeen."

"Seventeen, what a wonderful age! I can only dimly remember when I was seventeen," said Mrs. Brabazon. She looked at Octavia's radiant face: "I've always heard you were clever, but I can't remember anyone ever telling me you were pretty."

"I wonder who could have told you I was clever! We've so few friends in common. You know my mother a little, don't you? I'm sure *she* never told you I was clever!" said Octavia.

"Yes, I met her once at Malvern. We were in the same hotel. I thought her so good-looking and charming. We were both rather stranded and she told me a lot about your garden. How lovely Dunross must be!—Brab adores the Border country; he knows a Professor up there. He met him at a lunch in Glasgow—a sort of public lunch;—he thought him delightful."

"You don't mean Professor Horncastle, do you?" said Octavia. "Why, he's my dearest friend: I love him!"

"I'm not sure, but I think that was the name. Perhaps he might come here while you're with us. Do you think he would? Nothing would give me more pleasure, but I'm afraid we might bore him. You must talk to Brab about it."

As Mrs. Brabazon was speaking her husband came into the room.

"Here is Octavia Daventry. Have you had a good day? How did the Gordon horse go?"

"Sorry I wasn't here when you arrived, but there was no scent, and hounds dragged on till it was dark. I hope you've found everything you want. Your groom is coming to see you after dinner."

"I can't thank you enough, Colonel Brabazon, for all the trouble you've taken. You've been ever so kind!—I had a wire from Merlin saying the horses got here all right and are as fit as fiddles. Have you seen them?"

"No; but we'll go and see them to-morrow. I always go round the stables on Sundays. Jessica, you had better take Miss Daventry to her bedroom. We dine at quarter-past eight."

"Of course; how stupid of me!" said Mrs. Brabazon. "You must be tired out. Come and have a hot bath. Put on any old rag; we're alone."

Colonel Brabazon opened the door and they left him to read the evening papers.

Octavia was taking careful note of the sporting prints hung upon the walls of her bedroom and the books her hostess had put out for her to read, when there was a tap on the door: Mrs. Brabazon came in.

"I forgot to give you this letter. It came by the morning's post," she said and left the room.

Octavia sat down in front of the fire and opened her letter:

*You'll be far too excited to pity me, but I can't get away in time to hunt Tuesday. It's tiresome to think of your first day*



in a grass country on the horses I've bought for you and three hundred people to take my place. Hounds meet at Stanton Starkey—a vile place!—horrible great woods and primroses and things, but if there's a scent you may have a clinker. You'll be as stiff as buckram after your first day, so put Scrubb's ammonia in your bath. You must ride Kilmallock. He has a good temper and a turn of speed—let him stride along and be independent of everybody. Havoc hasn't nearly such good manners and may cowkick in the gateways; but don't put a tape in his tail: it's not popular, though you may have to come to it—(they're infernally rude in the Bragg).

Never take Havoc away from an obstacle to go through a gate, or select a low place in the fence, or he'll put you down out of temper. You must never disappoint him, as he's vain and brittle, but he's a fizzer! The field will be like dogs running after swallows if they attempt to catch him.

If Haycock goes inside the Harbington jungles you must follow him. There's not a huntsman in England less likely to let you down. Neither he nor Vince (the Bragg) ever fail to get a start: but it's child's play getting away with the Bragg; nevertheless you must keep your eye forrard and don't talk; as on bad scenting days Vince may give you a run without a fox—I mean they'll pick one up and be at the sea before you've finished your conversation.

I should feel my way on both horses before negotiating timber; Irish horses never see a rail, and though I've schooled them a bit it's not the same as hunting. Excitement may make them take off too soon and it only wants one fall to lay you out for dead over timber. They're both airy performers and in a very short time will be able to manipulate every class of obstacle. I doubt if you or anyone else will be able to wrestle them down. Never accept a mount from Brab or his wife. Her horses want a cutting whip and his are heavy. If you're hard up you can hire from "The Anchor and Dolphin." It's close to St. Mildred's and the fellow who owns it keeps an odd lot; but some of them jump. Hirelings are rum devils. They

*jump without being bold, they are stale without being tired, and they survive us all. Never attempt to catch a loose horse, as you won't succeed, and will only lose your place. Of course, if the confiding animal puts his head in your lap you'll be obliged to do the right thing.*

*The master at Stanton Starkey is quite a character ; but he never jumps a twig. Mind you make up to him. The two packs are infernally jealous of one another. When I'm at St. Mildred's I crab the Harbington and when I stay with Cuthbert I criticize the Bragg. The real difference between the two packs is the difference between cricket at Lord's and cricket at the Oval.*

*Yours,  
Robin Compton.*

That there was nothing personal in the letter was half a surprise and half a relief to Octavia. She would write him a long letter on Tuesday night, telling him all that had happened.

Before going to bed she stretched her arm out of the open window and felt with rapture that the rain was still falling.

When Mrs. Brabazon came down on Sunday morning she found her husband had taken Octavia to see her horses. She went into her boudoir and wondered if she would not have been wiser to have told Guy Coventry not to come to see her that afternoon. Mrs. Brabazon did not like direct action : it was contrary to all her ideas of good manners, and she shrank from wrangles as she would have from infection. Little good-humoured bickerings in public were sometimes amusing, but you had to be really fond of someone to quarrel with them in private. And after all, was it worth while ? The Master's visits were not for home consumption : they only amused her because he never went inside other people's houses. She was well aware that his attentions were more of a habit than an indulgence : but they had a value of their own. With every advancing day



she saw the time might come when her reputation for charm and ascendancy might diminish ; and as long as her friendship with the Master was a subject of discussion she was not likely to be obscure.

These reflections were passing through her mind when the door opened and the butler announced :

“ Sir Guy Coventry.”

A large man, smothered in a huge muffler, walked into the room. After shaking her clumsily by the hand he struggled to get off his overcoat.

“ You look as if you didn't expect me,” he said. “ Hope I'm not in the way. Didn't Brab tell you I've sent the horse here ? the one I think will suit you ? We're going to try him ; and Haycock wants me to bring Brab back with me to the Kennels this afternoon.”

“ When did Haycock invite Brab to the Kennels ? ” asked Mrs. Brabazon, getting up to assist him with his coat.

“ Don't know—out hunting, I suppose ; won't you come ? ” said Sir Guy, inspecting his top-boots. “ Brab said he thought you might.”

“ Brab said I would go larking on Sunday ? ” said Mrs. Brabazon with mild surprise.

“ I watch ; I don't lark ; I'm not going to sell you a horse till Brab has felt it under him. He's not up to my weight, but he's a good horse.”

At this moment Colonel Brabazon and Octavia returned, and the gong sounded for luncheon.

“ Let me introduce you to the Master of the Harbington, Miss Daventry. Are you pleased with your horses ? ” said Mrs. Brabazon without looking at her husband.

“ They're absolutely perfect ! I only hope they'll like me as much as I like them,” said Octavia. “ Is it a big country that we're riding over on Tuesday ? ” she said with a look half bold, half shy at the Master.

“ Don't know—always go through the gates myself—

but I see the young gentlemen from Dashington falling on their heads," replied Sir Guy with a chuckle. "Hope your horses are stayers: the going'll be sticky."

"I hope they are, but I've never been on them!" replied Octavia.

"You'll soon find out!" said the Master with another chuckle.

"I hear you're going to try the horse this afternoon that the Master wants us to buy, and he's taking you to the Kennels afterwards. You will have to help Haycock to judge at the puppy show," said Mrs. Brabazon. Turning to Octavia she added: "Do you know one hound from another?"

"I've never seen a hound in my life," she replied.

The Master dropped his knife, put down his napkin, and stared at Octavia. Had she said she had never seen the sea he would have been less surprised. Stunned and spell-bound he said:

"Gad!!—Never seen a hound?—Well, it's high time you did.—Never seen a hound; by Gad!" was all he could say.

"Brab must take you to see them. He will show you all their points. P'raps you'd like to lark over the fences after lunch. You've got a hack that jumps, haven't you?" asked Mrs. Brabazon.

"Oh! I'd love to! When will you start?" said Octavia; and tingling with excitement, she added: "Could one of your servants tell Merlin to bring Tattersalls round with your horse, Colonel Brabazon? You're coming, aren't you?—Oh! do come, Mrs. Brabazon."

"Wouldn't I be *de trop*, Brab?" asked his wife, looking at him with a slow smile.

"You're running hares, Jessica," said her husband irritably.

"Do I generally ride on Sundays, darling?" replied his wife.



"I don't know what you do on Sundays," replied her husband.

Octavia was surprised at the irritation of his voice, and observing a look of clumsy consciousness on the face of Sir Guy, she said :

"Does no one down here ride on Sundays?"

"I really couldn't tell you. I take so very little interest in what other people do down here: or even in what they say. Do you mind what people say behind your back?" asked her hostess.

"Not one little bit!" answered Octavia.

"Then perhaps you'll convert my husband. He takes a morbid interest in all the gossip round here," said Mrs. Brabazon.

"I take less interest in gossip than most people. But perhaps I take more interest in my friends," said the Colonel.

As Mrs. Brabazon never heard or listened to anything of which she chose to be insensible she pushed her chair back from the table.

"Let's go!" she said. "Run and put on your riding things."

Octavia did not need to be told twice, and full of happiness she raced upstairs two steps at a time.

The men were left alone with their coffee.

"Where do you draw first on Tuesday, Guy?"

"I hate meeting at Stanton Starkey—must do it sometimes, you know. All Dashington will be out. We'd better shog off to the woods."

"You might try that new spinney or Harbington Goss first. The postman saw a fox, he tells me, just outside the spinney where that woman has her chickens."

"Damn that woman! She's always asking for compensation. Why feed foxes? They'll get as tame as dormice."

Octavia returned to the dining-room. She wore a felt hat, and a covert coat over a flannel shirt and a wide leather belt round her waist.

"Business-like, by Gad!" exclaimed the Master, moved to an unaccustomed admiration. "Hold on!—Must go and say good-bye to Mrs. Brab."

"Sorry, Guy dear, but I'm rather headachy, or would walk out and watch you. Isn't Octavia Daventry lovely?" said Mrs. Brabazon, looking up from the sofa.

"She's a bit eccentric, isn't she?" said Sir Guy.

"I don't think so. She's clever, I believe, and reads a lot."

"Ah! She doesn't know much, does she? By Gad!—Never seen a hound! Did you hear that? All right!—I'm coming, Brab!—I don't like leaving you," said the Master, looking at her sheepishly.

"Don't you, Guy? I'm often rather lonely. But there it is!—Go off now, or Brab will get impatient. Will Lady Julia be at home this afternoon, do you think?"

"Don't know: expect she will," said Sir Guy.

When he had gone out of the room Mrs. Brabazon rang the bell and ordered the brougham.

Left to herself, she pondered over her husband's behaviour. It was so unlike him to make arrangements behind her back. The rôles had been exchanged: he had circumvented her. Nevertheless, his jealousy was so ridiculous that she would show him if she wished to spend her Sunday afternoons with the Master she would do it.

When the brougham was announced she drove to Stanton Starkey.

Lady Julia Coventry received Mrs. Brabazon with serenity; and after an exchange of small-talk, she said:

"When are you going to find wives for my two sons, Mrs. Brabazon? One of them must marry some day, I suppose, and none of us get any younger."

"Do you know, that is just what I was thinking, Lady Julia; though *you* have never got a day older since I first saw you!"

"You are right—no one can say I have lost my looks:



I'm as ugly as I ever was. There are advantages in being plain which you beauties could never appreciate. I often said to my husband, 'I suppose you married me for my looks, Mornington, for you certainly did not marry me for my money;' at which he would say; "Of course, *I* might have married Mrs. Langtry, but I don't like pretty women.' 'Then I can't fail to please you,' I would reply; and no one can say he and I were not happy together."

"I suppose Sir Mornington was not of a jealous disposition, Lady Julia, was he?"

"Men who are wrapped up in fox-hunting are always unobservant," she replied.

"That's true," said Mrs. Brabazon, "but there are men who are suspicious even when they care for hunting."

"You don't mean to tell me your husband is suspicious of you, Mrs. Brabazon!" exclaimed her hostess. "Then all I can say is, it's entirely your own fault. A clever woman should be able to allay all suspicions; and I should have thought your Colonel must know you perfectly by now."

"Do husbands ever know their wives? I doubt it!" said Jessica.

"That depends on how much he likes her. Of course, if he's indifferent, he won't study her; but a vain woman would not like that," said Lady Julia.

"I'm afraid I'm not vain: I find the ties of legitimacy excessively irksome."

"Believe me, my dear, the ties of illegitimacy are worse. I've tried both and know what I'm talking about."

"I daresay you're right. Perhaps I had better try both," said Mrs. Brabazon.

"I always say no one is as agreeable as those who live in secret sin; but I wouldn't like Guy to hear me. Neither of my sons take after me. They take after their father; and he was a great goose," said Lady Julia.

"Your husband must have been quite delightful. I only wish I had known him."

"My dear, you and he would not have got on together. He had little or no conversation."

"But I get on with both your sons, and no one can call them chatterboxes," said Jessica.

"You may think you get on with them, but they're not susceptible: you'll find when you've said good-bye that you have done most of the talking."

"How right you are, Lady Julia! They ought to marry expressionists: women who can fill in every gap."

"God forbid!" said Lady Julia.

When Mrs. Brabazon left Stanton Starkey and called at the kennels she found that the Master and her husband had not arrived. Hating the noise and the smell of hounds, after waiting some time she returned to St. Mildred's, feeling a little annoyed that she had not spent her afternoon as usual with the Master.

Engrossed in his Sunday manœuvres, Colonel Brabazon had forgotten to tell the Master that he would buy his horse for himself; so he sent him a note in the evening:

*I've got a horse that will suit you. I'll buy yours for myself. We'll make an exchange. I like your horse, but it's too heavy for Jessica. You can ask Haycock about Bluegrass; it was he who first suggested I should sell him to you. He never turned a hair that day we ran out of our country. He's a stayer; though he looks common. Come and see him when you've a day off. Anyway, old man, we meet Tuesday, and I hope the Dashington lot won't over-ride hounds and spoil our sport.*  
Brab.

Monday morning there was a dense white fog, and the Harbington decided they would not go out. Sir Guy walked up to the kennels with Colonel Brabazon's letter in his hand.

"What about it, Haycock?" he asked, sniffing the air.

"No use, Sir Guy. It's not going to clear. A day off



won't 'urt 'em ; and this fog might land us God knows where ! ” replied the huntsman.

“ Right ! ” said the Master. “ Then I'll go over and look at Colonel Brabazon's horse. Will Bluegrass do for Jack ? ”

“ Yes, Sir Guy. 'E's just what I wants. Jack's 'ard on a 'oss and won't take ' No ' for an answer. I sez to 'im last Tuesday, ‘ We'll 'ave to keep a racing stud for you, my boy—stone cold again ! ’—Then he up and sez to me, ‘ Vince mounts 'is men better,’ so I 'ad my answer ready ; I just sez off-'and like, ‘ Oh, indeed ! ’ and we passed the matter over. Jack's a good lad but very 'ard on 'osses—very 'ard indeed, Sir Guy.”

As hounds could not hunt, the Master ordered his buggy and drove to St. Mildred's in the afternoon to see Colonel Brabazon's “ Bluegrass.”

He found Mrs. Brabazon alone. She could hardly conceal her surprise at seeing him, for although she had heard there was no hunting, the Master had never been known to pay a visit even to St. Mildred's on any day but Sundays, and she felt a quiet satisfaction in thinking how surprised her husband would be. It was gratifying to find Sir Guy consoling himself for having missed being with her the day before ; and it was with no ordinary pleasure that she greeted him.

“ Gad ! how that Miss Something-or-other of yours rides ! ” said Sir Guy, settling himself into his accustomed arm-chair and giving a long whistle. “ She's got a topping pony—just the thing for you, fifteen-two. You should buy it. Pity you didn't come out yesterday.”

“ I thought Brab was a little rusty ! Didn't you ? I hate vexing him. Do you think he's a brutal husband for sometimes wanting me ? ”

“ Gad, no ! How did you get on with my mother ? ”

“ We always get on marvellously well. Lady Julia is the best company in the world,” replied Mrs. Brabazon, handing him her cigarette-case.

"Think so?" said the Master.

"Of course I do!—She's so amusing: and knows such a lot. I really believe there's nothing she doesn't know."

"Think so?" said Sir Guy; and thrusting his hands into his pockets he stretched out his legs. After a pause he broke the silence by saying, with the air of a man who is making an epigram: "She knows all about foxes."

There was another pause. Mrs. Brabazon said:

"So you had fun yesterday, did you, and you weren't angry with me for not going to watch you? I called at the kennels but you hadn't arrived. I wish I knew more about hounds."

"You should learn," replied the Master, sinking again into silence. Mrs. Brabazon wondered what possible reason he could have had for coming to see her, as he appeared even less articulate than usual. Remembering what Lady Julia had said to her about matrimony, her rapid mind prompted her to say:

"So Octavia Daventry rides beautifully, does she? I've always heard she is one of the best. I find her a delicious creature, so gay and quick. Don't you think her nose pretty? I confess I envy her nose."

"It's too cocky. I like the other kind of nose," said Sir Guy, looking at Mrs. Brabazon's profile.

"Hers is the only kind of nose I would like to have had," said Mrs. Brabazon. Again there was a long silence. The Master looked round the room and after poking the fire said:

"Pity the earth wasn't stopped last Tuesday. You don't like digging, but that fox ought to have died."

"Oh, Guy, how can you be so brutal?" said Mrs. Brabazon, with a contraction of her eyebrows. "I can't bear anything to suffer: digging is so cruel! and it's stupid; as that fox may give us another run. A good fox ought never to be killed."

"That fox won't run again. It was stone cold. You're



soft-hearted. I said to Brab, 'Your wife's too soft-hearted,' " said the Master, looking at her.

"And what did he say?" she replied, dropping her eyelids.

"I said he was a lucky devil."

"Who was the lucky devil?" asked Mrs. Brabazon.

"The fox," replied the Master: after which there was a long pause.

"Cuthbert's against digging, but he's modern," he continued.

Mrs. Brabazon did not answer.

"The Bragg lift their heads. There's not a dog among them I'd breed from. As for the bitches!—unless the scent's breast-high they don't do a stroke of work."

Jessica looked at the door and wondered what her husband could be doing. She lit a cigarette.

"You're not disappointed that your horse won't do for me, are you, Guy?"

"That's all right. Ticklish business, selling a horse to a woman. Look at Tilbury. He palmed off that circus horse, as he called it, on Miss Dawkins, and it laid her out for dead."

"But it's such a good hunter!—Miss Dawkins outfaces every horse she rides. Tilbury was terribly distressed when he heard of the accident."

"Ah!" said the Master, relapsing again into silence.

"It is sweet of you to have come to see me to-day," said Mrs. Brabazon.

"That's all right. Where's Brab?"

"I haven't an idea!"

"You told me yesterday you and he were going to spend a quiet afternoon together."

"Oh, did I?" she replied. "Ah! here he is! Brab dear, the Master has come specially to see you; he and I have been watching out of the window like Sister Ann," said Mrs. Brabazon, amused at the expression on her husband's face.

"To see me, has he, Jessica? I'm afraid you're exaggerating," replied the Colonel.

The Master, looking puzzled, said:

"What about the horse, Brab? Come into the library and I'll tell you what Haycock says."

"I had clean forgotten all about the horse! How stupid of me! All right, old man," answered the Colonel; and arm in arm they walked out of the room, leaving the door open.

When they had finished their conversation, Colonel Brabazon returned to the drawing-room. His wife looked up from the writing-table.

"What put you out this afternoon, darling? When you came into the room you looked quite cross."

"Nothing put me out. What did you talk to Guy about?"

"Ah! That's a secret!" said his wife. At that moment Octavia came into the room.

"Do you ever play the game of noughts and crosses?" asked Mrs. Brabazon.

"Not since our governess left," replied Octavia.

"The Master and I have been playing it for the last hour," said Jessica, and stretching her arms above her head, she gave a long yawn.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE GREAT DAY

JOHN Addington Symonds writes :

*There are emotions deeply seated in the joy of exercise, when the body is brought into play, and masses move in concert, of which the subject is but half conscious.*

*Music and dance, and the delirium of battle or the chase act thus upon spontaneous natures. The mystery of rhythm, associated energy and blood tingling in sympathy is here. It lies at the root of man's most tyrannous instinctive impulses.*

If an invalid, living away from his friends, divorced from the companionship of cultivated people, and with little prospect of ever seeing anything but peaks, lakes, and frozen ravines, could write like this, it is not surprising that healthy men and women should give up so much of their time to fox-hunting. Everyone looks at life differently. Some people shirk it; some respect it; some take it lightly; others take it seriously; but sooner or later we all have to recognize it. For some people it is a ticket on a passenger train, or a track from which deviation has never been seriously considered; but for the majority, life is a pursuit.

When the Professor quoted a saying of Mr. Asquith's :  
"The real interest in life is not the quarry, but the quest,"  
Octavia said :

"This shall be my motto."

Ambitious, imaginative, and alert, Octavia was intolerant

of people who had not the courage to live. To her it would have been an act of treachery to lower any of the demands she put upon life. She felt that "ask, and it shall be given to you" or even "*take*, and it shall be given to you" was her birthright; and those who did not agree with her deserved everything they got. Her lovers thought her insensible because they did not realize that her vitality came from living in the future. There was always a fox ahead of her. She was hard with the joy of youth; and the reason of her insensibility was because her eyes were fixed on that wonderful fox and could only look into her lovers' for a brief moment in the pauses of her pursuit. She did not dream of the fox: it was there.

And the fox?—Would it run straight as described in novels, or illustrated upon Christmas cards?—Her fox might get trapped, might escape, or might run to earth. But wherever it went, and however dangerous the run, she would not give up till she had caught it. She would never, *never* surrender.

The rhythm of thoughts such as these was pacing through Octavia's blood when she jumped out of bed on Tuesday morning, the first day she was to go out hunting; the Day of Days.

Wishing to look her best, yet fearing to be conspicuous, she wore a loose covert-coat over a pepper-and-salt whipcord habit, and a buff cloth double-breasted waistcoat. After putting her tie twice round her neck, she secured it with a safety-pin; and tucked away her curls under a becoming billy-cock hat. Satisfied with her appearance, she went downstairs to breakfast.

Colonel Brabazon looked up from his morning paper.

"I'm glad to see you wear thick boots and no spur," he said. "I disapprove of women who wear spurs and always objected to my wife's patent-leather boots."

"Isn't Mrs. Brabazon hunting to-day?" asked Octavia.

"No, she doesn't like the crowd; she's going to drive



with Mrs. Malet. Don't wait for me if you want to go home early: there are a hundred sign-posts, so you'll have no difficulty in finding your way. My second horseman can carry your sandwiches, if you like."

"Oh! You must never think of me when we're out together, or I should be miserable—I've told Merlin to join us later on Tatts. He's wildly keen to see the hounds and the horses; so he'll take my sandwiches, thank you," said Octavia.

The meet being near, they decided to hack their hunters to covert. Having finished a breakfast at which Octavia was too excited to eat, they walked across the gravel approach to the stables.

Merlin, who was as excited as his mistress, had been leading Kilmallock round and round the yard for some time before the hour of starting. Having been in a racing stable, he knew better than any groom in Harbington how to plait a horse's mane, and Octavia looked with ecstasy at the horse she was going to ride.

"Good morning, Merlin. What will you say if I bring him in lame? The horse looks well, doesn't he, Colonel Brabazon? I'm glad you've put a heavy bit on him. D'you think he'll pull?"

"Won't matter if 'e does. I've 'ad a look round, and the enclosures are about the biggest in England, I should say. But if you don't pull at 'im, 'e'll be all right. You want 'im to go, and go 'e will!—so there'll be no occasion for either of you to pull. That's right, isn't it, Colonel?" said Merlin.

"Perfectly right, Merlin. If hounds run and you get away there won't be much pulling up to-day; to look at him I should think he could carry two of you."

Kilmallock was a well-bred, brown horse over sixteen hands high, and in such faultless condition that he could have won a steeple-chase. He had flat, sinewy legs, large clean hocks, loose elbows, and muscular thighs. His ears

were big, which gave character to his head, and his eyes were wise and gentle.

Colonel Brabazon, eyeing him from his muzzle to his hoofs, said :

“ I haven’t seen a better-looking horse than that for years. May I ask if you gave much for him ? ”

“ We gave two hundred and fifty guineas for Kilmallock and two hundred for Havoc. Papa told Mr. Compton that he must get perfection for me, as I’ve never hunted before. He impressed upon him that my life was valuable ! ”

“ I don’t suppose Robin needed much impressing ! ” said the Colonel, looking at Octavia. “ I don’t call him dear. My only criticism is he looks too big for you. I must say Robin has bought you two nice horses. I wonder where he got them.”

As Octavia was about to mount herself—an accomplishment she was proud of—Kilmallock lifted an expostulating foreleg, and swished his long tail till it almost touched the middle of his back. Merlin held him firmly by the head, and didn’t move a muscle till his mistress was firmly seated in the saddle. After a few low-toned injunctions Octavia and the Colonel started off on the gravel drive leading to the turnpike.

Rows of hunters without riders were being led at a dignified trot by second horsemen ; and every sort of human being was riding, driving, straggling, or walking in the direction of the meet.

Kilmallock was the wisest of horses, and neither nervous or excitable ; but he was easily amused, and when he saw the other horses, he arched his back and gave a few well-bred kicks with a smoothness of action that filled Octavia with confidence.

“ You’re happy to-day,” said Colonel Brabazon, looking at the dancing eyes and radiant face beside him. “ Come off the road and mind the grips on the grass—he may put his foot in them. I can see he’s a bit above himself.”



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Octavia had no sooner taken her horse on the grass than a thorough-bred chestnut, pulling wildly at his bit, passed like an arrow down the middle of the road.

"Hullo!" shouted Lord Tilbury, reining back his horse. "Good morning, Miss Daventry. You've entered that one for the Grand National, I suppose," he said. "He's in the Book, I guess, or d—d near it. Let me be your jockey. I'll lay a parson to a bishopric you'll make curates of us all to-day. My pedigreed paterfamilias is sure to go burrowing in the Rushingford brook if I don't look to it. I must shog on and find him." With which he lifted his hat and put his horse into a gallop.

"Won't he tire his hunter before he gets to the meet?" asked Octavia as she watched him disappear down the road.

"That's not his hunter; it's his hack. It's a wonder, and has probably been going that pace all the way from Dashington. Tilbury's got the courage of a tiger, but he has no judgment. Good morning, Miss Dawkins," said Colonel Brabazon to a hard-bitten young woman who had joined them. "Glad to see you out again none the worse for your fall."

"Thank you, Colonel Brabazon. It wasn't anyone's fault but my own: I was going too fast. I never quite know what Tilbury does between giving his horse the office and letting him take off, but I observe most people wrestle his horses down. It takes some time to train the hunters you buy from him into one's own way of riding. You saw yourself how even Jarvis, the dealer, took a toss the morning Tilbury mounted him," replied Miss Dawkins.

"Let me introduce you to Miss Daventry. This is her first day out hunting," said the Colonel.

"She's jolly well mounted," said Miss Dawkins, nodding to Octavia, and looking at Kilmallock with the eye of a possible purchaser. "Where did you find him?"

"He was sent to me from Ireland," said Octavia.

"Then you needn't funk the Rushingford: Stanton

Starkey is a horrible place to get a start from ; we all turn away from that d—d brook ! ”

“ Come, Miss Dawkins, you know you never turn away from anything,” said Colonel Brabazon.

“ How can you say such a thing ! I hate water like the devil ! That’s the reason I bought Tilbury’s Sanger-circus horse : there’s not an arm of the sea he can’t get over,” replied Miss Dawkins.

Octavia looked at her companion’s hardy, bronzed complexion, and rat-catcher’s get-up, and observed the clever, active little horse she was riding. At that moment a dog-cart came up behind them and a gentle voice called :

“ Brab ! ”

Turning round they saw Mrs. Malet driving a high-stepping horse with Mrs. Brabazon seated beside her. They were wrapped in furs, and a very small groom was guarding a hamper on the back seat.

“ You do look nice,” said Mrs. Brabazon with unfeigned admiration. “ Is that Kilmallock ? He looks a perfect wonder. Hasn’t he got beautiful quarters ? And what a head ! He really is perfection, isn’t he, Brab ? I pray we may have the luck to see you to-day. Don’t you feel terribly excited ? I shall never forget my first day—you remember, Brab ?—the day I asked who you were ; and then we were introduced to one another.”

Colonel Brabazon was not listening, and Octavia—trying to keep pace with the dog-cart without upsetting her horse—said :

“ I can’t describe what I feel, Mrs. Brabazon ! ”

At this moment several pink-coated young gentlemen galloped past her on the grass by the side of the road, and Kilmallock, taking little interest in the dog-cart, gave a bound into the air, and straining at his bridle passed the carriages.

On arriving at the meet, to Octavia’s unpractised eye there appeared more hounds, more horses, more servants, more vehicles, and more bicycles than had ever been gathered



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together for the purpose of killing a fox. Colonel Brabazon having disappeared, she eyed the various sportsmen. Finding she was dangerously near the other riders, she moved away into an open space. The horses galloping up from behind irritated Kilmallock, who started a few active and lively plunges. Remembering Merlin's instructions, Octavia turned away from the field and cantered on to the turf towards the house. Several men were drinking in the courtyard, and a servant walked towards her holding a silver salver of sandwiches in his hand. Kilmallock swerved violently away, and seeing a low paling in front of him he pricked his ears, gave two bounds and skipped over it.

The railing was about the height that Robin Compton had been schooling him over in Ireland. Octavia drew the curb-rein through her fingers; Kilmallock dropped his head, and she had no difficulty in stopping him. But she felt anxious, and wondered if when hounds ran she would have sufficient control. She was uncomfortable at finding herself in an isolated position. Separated by the palings from the other horses Kilmallock was less playful; and as she was speculating upon the best way of rejoining the field without having to jump the rail again, the hounds moved off.

"Hi! What are you doing on that golf course? It's private!" shouted a man, running up to the railings.

"I'm ever so sorry," said Octavia, "but I've done no damage."

"Don't let the Master catch you, that's all!" said the man in an excited voice. "I'm responsible for that golf course and you ain't; so come off!"

Seeing the whole field moving towards her, Octavia did not like to jump the rail.

"Isn't there a gate down there that I could go through?" she asked.

"The gate's locked. Just you come off that there golf course, or I'll tell Sir Guy!"

Feeling herself in a quandary, Octavia took Kilmallock back and jumped the rail. She heard a man say as she landed :

“ Gosh ! what a mover ! What horse is that, I wonder, and who’s the female ? ”

“ One of the Dashington lot, I suppose,” was the answer.

As the last thing she wanted was to be conspicuous, Octavia pushed into the middle of the jostling riders. Kilmallock, having got over his first exuberance, was as quiet as a chaperone.

As she was anxious to have a look at the hounds, she managed to thread her way to the front and found herself riding beside the Master.

“ Hullo ! ” he said, “ another horse to-day ! ”

“ Don’t you think Tattersalls—the one I rode Sunday—is too small for this country, Sir Guy ? ”

“ Shouldn’t say so. Look out ! look out ! Don’t you see they’re stopping ? You were damned near Trickster,” said the Master as the field came to a standstill. “ Haycock’s finding out if the earths are stopped.”

“ Sorry ! ” said Octavia, angry with the hound that had crossed under Kilmallock’s nose. Sir Guy left her to speak to the huntsman, and after some delay they all moved on at the uncomfortable trot known as “ hounds’ pace.”

Down a long avenue, past two ornamental lodges they left the Park ; and the field filed through a gate into a large grass enclosure. The whips galloped forward, and after a few strange sounds from the huntsman the whole pack plunged into a thick gorse covert.

It was a soft windless day : the sky dappled with dark and motionless clouds. The hedges looked black, and an earthy smell of damp pasturelands filled the air. Octavia moved slowly forward so as to be out of the way of the crowd who were lining up towards a gate. She scrutinized the country, and the first bull-finch she would have to negotiate if the fox ran down wind. The fences appeared enormous,



and she regretted she had not ridden Kilmallock on Sunday, as she would have known more about him. She felt sure the obstacles round St. Mildred's were not nearly as formidable as the ones she was looking at ; and wondered in which direction she would meet the dreaded brook. Staring about all round, she looked in vain to see if there were any pollarded willows, and prayed with fervour that Kilmallock would not land her in the middle of the water.

A grey horse of quality galloped up to her, and Lord Tilbury said :

"If hounds turn back—which they usually do, as the foxes are hand-fed round here—avoid the ornamental palings and keep out of the Park, or you'll find yourself breaking the glass of the cucumber frames. Hush ! hold on ! . . . I believe they've found. Golly ! that's a Halloa !—*they have !* Pull out, pull out !—let him go !"

Avoiding the crowd that was thundering to the gate, Tilbury galloped at racing speed to the fence that Octavia had been watching. The grey rose like a bird, closely followed by Kilmallock, and they landed in the next field on to a stiff ridge and furrow. As her horse was pulling at her, Octavia thought it wise to let him choose his own line. Just as she was deciding the best place in the fence in front of her, Jarvis the dealer came galloping alongside and said in an excited voice :

"Hounds are heading for the brook ; don't let anyone pass you. If they refuse, it will put your horse out ; it's best to get there first !"

Kilmallock did not like the ridge and furrow ; but Octavia let him gallop over it in his own way and he ceased pulling at her. The next three enclosures scattered the field, as everyone was thinking of the brook ; but hounds were racing ahead and Octavia, observing some of the thrusters galloping in the same direction as herself, felt she could not go far wrong. Taking her own line on the top of the ridge, and going great guns, she saw what looked like the tops of

pollarded willows. As they got nearer she recognized the Rushingford, made even more alarming by a flight of post and rails several yards in front of it. Not wishing anyone to pass her, she went at them too fast, but Kilmallock collected himself and she hardly felt him rise before he had landed. She heard a noise of cracking timber and a loose horse careered past her. She did not look round; and if a corpse had lain at her feet she would not have pulled up. Her eye was arrested, and heart fixed, by the sight of a row of willows.

The fall of the ground made it difficult to see the banks of the brook, but as the willows came closer Octavia took her foot out of the stirrup and was prepared to jump the Styx. Kilmallock, feeling that the flower of the Harbington was on his tracks, did not propose to give up the lead, and having jumped water since he was a two-year-old swung over the brook at the widest place with an ease that surprised his rider. Miss Dawkins and the dealer made a bit of a scramble landing on the far bank, and some of the bloods from the Bragg splashed into the middle of the water.

At that moment hounds checked, and Octavia had time to see Lord Tilbury flying full tilt over the timber; but at every advancing stride after that his horse began to shut up, and on reaching the water he turned with acrobatic quickness up the bank, nearly throwing his rider over his head.

"By God—who can tell me where I can find a bridge over this blasted sea?" he said, turning to an equally unfortunate competitor.

"I don't belong to the Harbington, my dear Tilbury, or you may be sure I'd have a map of every bridge in my pocket," was the reply. "Hold on! With luck hounds may cross again and come our way."

The engulfed riders were labouring up the boggy banks, while their horses were standing up to their hocks in water. Belated members of the hunt came galloping from every



direction to see what was happening. Miss Dawkins and the dealer—fearing they might have to charge the brook again—took advantage of the check to move discreetly away. At this moment the whole pack, with Haycock and the Master in the middle of them, swept down under Kilmallock's nose, and picking up the scent sailed away across the sixty-acre pasture as if nothing could stop them.

Observing the limited number of the field that were on the right side of the Rushingford, and some of his enemies in trouble, Sir Guy turned to his huntsman with a happy chuckle :

"Whoever can catch 'em now," he said, "has my full permission to ride on the top of their backs."

Octavia's exaltation knew no bounds. Why had she not been christened Beatrice ?

"There was a star danced, and under that was I born."

No one who has not ridden a strange horse over a big country for the first time can imagine the confidence that is established between a horse and his rider after the perfect accomplishment of the first few fences ; and Kilmallock, knowing he had a feather-weight on his back, resolved that nothing that day should pass him.

The Harbington kept their noses down and clustered together over the next four or five fields across the vale towards the village of Barleymow : a perfect line only taken a few times in the history of the hunt. Just before reaching the turnpike the pack split, each lot running at high speed.

It looked as if the hunt was going to be spoilt, and to those who had risked everything this was a blow ; but seeing Haycock sticking to the leading hounds, the whips managed to head off the smaller lot, and as if by a miracle they joined the other portion of the pack. For a moment there appeared to be some confusion, but a couple and a half held the line, and the whole pack swept on as if they had never been divided.

After going for some time, the large enclosures began to tell on the horses, but nothing seemed to affect Kilmallock. The ridge and furrow having disappeared, he could extend himself without the feeling of embarrassment which—good as his shoulders were—he had conveyed to his mistress earlier in the day ; and for the next twenty minutes Octavia felt that she was in Heaven. Wishing to avoid the village of Barleymow she took a wrong turn, and found herself separated from all that was left of the field by an impenetrable bull-finch ; and to her dismay the hounds disappeared from view.

The intricacies of a village with its pigsties, clothes-lines, and manure heaps, will spoil the best of runs ; but the Harbington were not to be put off. A couple of hounds, throwing their tongues, took up the scent, and the whole pack emerged from among the cottages into the turnpike. Octavia's heart beat as she observed this. She galloped as fast as she could, along the field level with the road, cursing her luck at seeing the size of the fence which separated her from her companions. Suddenly she saw a gate in the bull-finch where the road turned. As they had been running for forty minutes she felt a little apprehensive, but seeing no other way of joining the hounds and that the gate was locked, she hardened her heart, and with a magnificent effort Kilmallock—who was as eager as his mistress to be in at the finish—cleared the top rail and landed on the grass, narrowly escaping jarring his legs upon the turnpike. This feat was not lost upon those who were pounding down the road. In the check that followed a large man, magnificently mounted, went up to Octavia, and taking off his hat said :

“ Well done, young lady ! You must never part with that horse. Hold hard ! Haycock, there's a fellow holding up his hat ! ”

Octavia had not time to thank him, as the hounds were sniffing and circling round her horse's feet. There was a



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delay after this. The Master came thundering down the road, breathless, red, and happy. Villagers ran up to him full of information. Some said the fox had gone into a drain, but there was no drain; some said it had been headed by cattle in the adjoining field; and others were pretty sure it had been coursed by a sheepdog; but however often hounds feathered up and down they could not pick up the line. After watching for some time Octavia and those that were left of her companions were only too glad to dismount, stretch their legs, and examine the sobbing sides of their tired horses.

While sandwiches were munched and flasks drained the big gentleman on the fine horse came up and said:

"Forgive me for speaking to you, Miss Daventry; but after a run like this we're bound together by an undying memory. You owe me more than you can be aware of; it was through me that Compton bought your horse. He was shown to me before I left Ireland, and was bred by a farmer from whom I've bought most of my best horses near the town of Kilmallock. The moment I saw him I told Robin and Cuthbert to buy him. The horse was made for Vince, but having had the privilege of seeing you on him to-day I do not regret his present ownership."

"How nice of you to speak to me! I *am* grateful. He's a wonderful performer, isn't he? I only hope I've not tired him. D'you think I have?" she asked.

"Let me have a look at him. No, I don't think so, but you must take him home now, as our next draw will be in the high country and you are a long way from St. Mildred's."

"Of course I shouldn't dream of going on. How far am I from Harbington, should you say?"

"I'm afraid it must be eighteen miles by road. Have you got a motor or anything you could go home in?"

"No. Hounds met so near, Colonel Brabazon never thought there would be any difficulty; but I might hire

some sort of vehicle in the village and pay a man to lead my horse home. Wouldn't that be a good plan?" said Octavia, realizing that, with her indifferent bump of locality, she would never find her way.

"I don't think you will get anything in the villages here; I'll tell you what I should advise. When my second horseman comes, he can take you to my house, which is only seven miles from here, and you can have tea and go home in my motor. You'll forgive me for not accompanying you, but the scent is so good I should not be surprised if hounds gave us another gallop." Seeing a look of disappointment in Octavia's face he continued: "You must not go on; as after the way your horse has carried you it would be more than imprudent to tire him. Have you ever seen a better run than the one we have had to-day?"

"I've never been out hunting before, so I'm not a judge; but it has been the most thrilling sensation I've ever experienced," said Octavia.

"You've never jumped a fence before? You don't mean to tell me that . . . ?"

"Oh, I've jumped the fences in our fields in Scotland; but I meant I've never been out hunting till to-day."

"All I can say is I should have thought you had hunted all your life. Ah! here come the second horsemen."

At this moment a cavalcade of horses and some of the field that had been left behind came hustling down the road. Octavia looked everywhere for Merlin, but he was not to be seen. After wandering about for some time Miss Dawkins—the only other woman who had seen the run—came up to her.

"You would have had the brush if we had been hunting in the 'eighties and you would have been blooded," she said. "As long as I live I shall never forget the way your horse jumped that gate into the road. Sir Harry Pelham was only doing what a lot of us would like to have done when he took off his hat to you."



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"Is he called Sir Harry Pelham, that big man I've been speaking to?" asked Octavia.

"Yes. That's the man. You've heard of him, I suppose? He's the finest rider in the country, except perhaps Robin Compton; but he never loses his temper, which can't be said of Robin. I'd die happy if Sir Harry were to take his hat off to me; but he never will, because he says I've got no judgment."

"I expect if I had fallen over the gate he would have said the same of me," said Octavia.

"Oh, no; that was just the moment to risk everything. I'm bold at the wrong time. I think Sir Harry wants to speak to you," said Miss Dawkins.

Accompanied by his second horseman Sir Harry Pelham went up to Octavia:

"You'd better not let your horse get cold," he said. "Norris will take you back now, and when you get to Chivers Kilmallock can stay the night in my stables. He's had a pretty hard day, and it would be foolish to risk a long trot home. Can you mount yourself?"

"Yes, thanks: it's ever so good of you and I expect you're right. Shall we meet on Friday? I'm going out with the Bragg."

"Then I shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing you." With this Sir Harry gave a few instructions to his man, and lifting his hat, rode off to join the hounds.

Octavia rode in silence along the road by the side of Sir Harry's second horseman. Their horses were too tired to go at a faster pace than the sort of trot which nobody but grooms enjoys, and though she would not have confessed it, the excitement of the day being over, left her chilly and exhausted. Having had little to eat since her dinner of the night before, it was as much as Octavia could do to suppress her yawns. The light had disappeared and an impenetrable fog was settling like a veil, above, beyond, and round about them.

"How horrible this is, Norris! Do you think it'll last?" said Octavia, shivering.

"One can't tell, miss. It may be only local."

"Do you mean that because there's a fog here it might be clear in the Dashington country?"

"Yes, miss. Fogs are the blemish of these parts, but the Bragg don't get them so bad."

Relieved to hear this, Octavia and her escort pursued their way, keeping close to such landmarks as were visible. When they reached the lodge gates and saw lights in the windows of the house the atmosphere seemed to clear, and Octavia forgot her coldness and fatigue in the pleasure she felt at the prospects of hunting with the Bragg.

"I'll give the horse his gruel and make him comfortable, miss, and get through to St. Mildred's to tell your groom he's safe and sound. We'll lead him over in the morning. Anything else you wish me to say, miss?"

"Thank you so much, Norris. Just say I'm all right and will be back for dinner."

After seeing her horse into a loose box Octavia walked through the fog to the house. She was met by an elderly butler standing in the portico who conducted her into a warm and brightly lit hall. Stags' heads, foxes' heads, racks of hunting crops ornamented the walls, and large packing cases were piled up upon the floor.

"If you please, miss, we had a telephone message from Sir Harry to say you would want tea and the motor to take you to St. Mildred's. Will you take poached eggs, tea, or coffee, or anything in particular, miss?"

"Thanks so much. Poached eggs and coffee will be perfect. You've a lot of people here, haven't you? I'm afraid I'm giving you *endless* trouble," said Octavia, looking at the luggage.

"Don't mention it, miss. There's no one here but Sir Harry's nephew—Master Greville. He arrived from Italy this morning. He likes unpacking his books and things



himself—though these cases should have been removed to his bedroom. "This way, miss," replied the butler, turning on the light as he conducted her up the heavily carpeted staircase and pointed to the door of a bedroom.

"I will put your tea in Master Greville's room, as it's warmer there. That's the room—the first on the right at the foot of the stairs, miss."

Left to herself, Octavia took off her hat and shook the hair off her forehead. While wiping her face with a towel she wondered if Master Greville was a boy, and if she would have tea in the schoolroom. She walked about, drying her hands and examining the room. The walls were hung with every kind of sporting picture, coloured prints, and engravings; and a shiny chintz of angry rosebuds covered the chairs and sofa. There was a blazing fire in the grate, and a stuffed fox's head with two brushes crossed above it ornamented the top of the chimneypiece. A brass inscription, which she could not read, was stuck on the yellow oak framing the fox's head. A heavy mahogany wardrobe and large four-poster completed a comfortable bedroom.

As Octavia turned out the light and opened the door she heard a piano, and recognized that someone was playing a Bach fugue. She stood and listened, and thought Master Greville could not be very young to play so well. A footman at the bottom of the stairs said:

"Your tea is ready, miss," and opening a door he announced, "Miss Daventry."

"Master Greville," as the butler called him, got up from the piano, and without more than a casual glance greeted Octavia in a slow and undisturbing style. He was tall and shabbily dressed, and his face cut with almost painful sharpness. The whole countenance wore an air of gravity one might have called severe had it not been for the beauty of two steady and unusual eyes set under an intellectual forehead. Accustomed to the vagaries of his uncle's household and the hospitable habits of the sporting world, he was not

surprised when the butler informed him that a message had come from Sir Harry to say a guest from St. Mildred's would be arriving for tea.

Octavia felt sure when she shook hands with him that she had seen his face before. Questioning within herself where and when she could ever have seen him, she looked at him closely.

"I expect you are cold," he said. "Sit down and give yourself your tea, Miss Daventry."

"Thank you," said Octavia. "I confess I'm as hungry as a hawk. Won't you eat something?"

He shook his head and walked to the fire. After a moment's silence, Octavia said:

"Are you Master Greville?"

"I suppose I am to our old butler; but not, I fear, to many others. He has known me since I was born; though he hasn't seen very much of me."

"Why? Don't you come here often?"

"No—you see, I don't ride, so I feel rather out of it down here. I've just come from Italy; I arrived this morning."

"What do you do in Italy?"

"My mother's got a villa in Florence. Is this your first visit to this country?"

"Yes, I'm staying with the Brabazons. How did you know I was called Daventry?"

"Barton told me he had a message from my uncle to say you were leaving your horse here for the night. I suppose you're fond of hunting?"

"I adore it! What a pity you don't ride!"

"I never had the opportunity. My father died when I was a boy, and my mother and uncle have different tastes."

"Does your mother live with you?"

"She lives in London. She's not sporting, either."

"Then you live alone?"

"We spend our holidays in Florence together; but I am



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often with her in London. We both care for music and have a lot of tastes in common."

"I adore music," said Octavia. "You were playing the C Sharp minor Fugue, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was. I'm afraid you won't find many people down here who will share your enthusiasm for music," he said.

"You despise hunting and hunting people, I suppose, Mr. Pelham?" said Octavia, looking at his grave face.

"I would not say that; but I'm glad I wasn't brought up in this country. I might have liked it as much as you do, and I'm quite sure I would never have ridden well. It's better to avoid experiments that come to grief, isn't it?"

"Oh, no! I think one should try everything in life. It's so much more exciting."

"Is that what you intend to do?" he inquired, looking almost for the first time at her.

"Well, yes. There are ever so many things I would like to do. I should, in any case, hate nothing as much as a well-regulated life!"

"I expect you would. Perhaps I'm not equally adventurous. To tell you the truth, I've never thought much about it; but I've always intended to have a life of my own."

"Doesn't Demosthenes say there are people who would have felt themselves lost had they tried to live their own lives?" said Octavia.

At this moment the butler came into the room:

"If you please, sir, there is a dense fog outside, and I doubt if Miss Daventry will be able to get to Harbington," he said.

"Oh, I must go!—if you don't mind risking your motor—as Mrs. Brabazon will be terribly upset. You don't mind my going, do you?" said Octavia, with a look of anxiety in her face.

"Tell them to send the motor round, Barton. I'll take Miss Daventry to St. Mildred's."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm afraid I'm putting you out dreadfully; but why should you go with me? I assure you I can manage perfectly; I always go about alone," said Octavia, with a feeling half of fatigue and half of embarrassment. "Will you lend me a coat?"

"Of course. But I won't let you go alone. Wait a minute and I'll fetch a coat."

When the door closed Octavia suddenly remembered where she had seen Greville Pelham. When he returned, she said:

"I've been racking my brain all the time we've been talking, trying to think where I had seen your face, and now I remember. Mrs. Brabazon has got a photograph of you in her bedroom."

"Has she? Oh, that's a very old one. I wonder why she kept it. I'll show you a photograph of my mother," he said, looking about on his writing-table.

"What a beautiful face!" she said as he handed her a photograph of a woman's head. "Is that your mother?"

"The motor is there, sir; but it's very thick," said the butler, coming into the room. "Norris has had a message from Sir Harry to say he has been held up and is staying the night at Frisby. Hadn't you better let me pack a change of clothes for you, sir, and let the Colonel put you up for the night? You can't see your hand in front of you."

"I might do that, but wouldn't it be better for you to stay here, Miss Daventry? It seems foolish for us all to get lost in a fog. Let's go and see what it's like."

Octavia followed her host to the front door.

"Is there any chance of getting to St. Mildred's to-night, Hudson?" he asked.

"I might manage it, sir, but it's doubtful," replied the chauffeur. "The fog won't clear to-night. We'd have to take a man with lamps and go at a foot's pace."

"In that case I shall not permit you to go. All right,



Hudson, we shan't want you. Get on the telephone and put me through to St. Mildred's, Barton."

"But how can I stay here, Mr. Pelham? I've got no clothes."

"I can lend you a Chinese dressing-gown; and Mrs. Plumtree, our housekeeper, can rig you up somehow. I shan't allow you to go to St. Mildred's to-night. You don't know what the fogs are in this country. They ought to put up lighthouses instead of telegraph-posts."

The matter being settled they sat down on each side of the fireplace.

"Mrs. Brabazon will be terribly upset!" said Octavia.

"I don't think anything upsets Mrs. Brabazon. Do you know her well?"

"Not at all. I've only been with her four days. But you do, don't you?"

"At one time I did, but I've not seen her for two years."

"She's the most fascinating woman I've ever met, and has the sort of beauty that if I were a man I would be wildly in love with."

"You don't find her just a little too urbane?" said Greville thoughtfully.

"What a curious expression! I should never have thought of it. You mean agreeable, I suppose," said Octavia.

"If you like," he said.

"I wonder——" replied Octavia. "Do you think it's an advantage to be unforthcoming?"

"That depends on what is to come. If I am to be met more than halfway I don't like to come up against nothing."

"Mrs. Brabazon can hardly be described as 'nothing'! I call her a brilliant woman; and amazingly accommodating, good-humoured, and kind."

"I glide off people who are too accommodating: I prefer a rougher surface," he said.

There was a pause after this and Octavia had an instinct

that he wanted to change the subject. She suggested that she should go to her room. Mrs. Plumtree was outside the door.

"If you please, sir, I've got some clothes for Miss Daventry from the Rectory; I understand she is staying the night. What time will you want dinner, sir?"

"Shall we say half-past eight? It's seven now: that'll give you time to rest," said Greville.

He watched her go upstairs and then called out:

"Will it disturb you if I play the piano?"

Octavia leant over the banisters and assured him that nothing would disturb her.

Left to himself, Greville Pelham lit a pipe and sat down before the fire. He was puzzled: and wondered what the young woman he was harbouring was like; and how she came to be staying at St. Mildred's. Fond of hunting, loving music, quoting Demosthenes, it was certain she would not meet many people in that part of the world to interest her. He might of course find out from Jessica Brabazon, but she never said anything about a girl. It was against all her principles to criticize them. Her praise was monotonously the same—the more automatic as she did not care for girls. Nor, for the matter of that, did he; but he had never known one, that he could remember. Octavia might be a useful topic of conversation if the moment came when he would be alone with Mrs. Brabazon—a meeting to which he did not look forward with any pleasure, but which he knew must take place sooner or later.

It was just possible that she would disapprove of an unchaperoned Miss spending a night alone with a bachelor; as he had often observed that women who had something to conceal were more straitlaced than those who lived irreproachable lives. He puffed at his pipe, and his thoughts strayed.

"If you please, sir, the fog must have affected the telephone. We can't get through to the Colonel, but I've



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left a message at the Harbington Post Office to say that if there are any inquiries, Miss Daventry is staying with Sir Harry," said Barton. "Anything else, sir?"

"Just put some champagne on the ice."

"That man's a Napoleon," said Greville to himself as Barton closed the door.

Settling farther down in the arm-chair, his reflections returned to the unavoidable meeting which sooner or later would take place between himself and Jessica Brabazon.

She would no doubt greet him as if he had never been away: as if she had received all the letters he had never written, and was barely conscious of the break in their intimacy of which he was the sole and determined author. This would avoid the necessity of all explanations, and he would be spared the contraction—both irritating and disturbing—of her eyebrows. Perhaps he had been wrong in exhibiting so much violence; perhaps he was still in the wrong for feeling after such a long interval so much bitterness; but he could not shake off the memory that his belief in women had been shattered by his friendship with Jessica.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and went up to his bedroom.

Greville Pelham was opposed by every instinct to all demonstrativeness, but when he saw Octavia waiting for him in the sitting-room he could not avoid exclaiming:

"How nice you look in my dressing-gown! I'll give it to you, if you like. I brought it back from China. Would you like me to give it to you?"

Octavia, who had slept without turning—and but for the gong would have remained sleeping—was in the highest of spirits.

"Nothing in the world I'd like better!" she said. "It will remind me always of the greatest day of my life."

He looked at her standing in his dressing-gown tightly draped about her lissome figure. Octavia had an instinct of how to make the best of her beauty on the occasions that

she felt to be important, and having discarded the garments borrowed from the Rectory, she had enjoyed draping herself in the flowered crêpe of her host's dressing-gown. Finding a vase of flowers on the table, she had pinned a rose-coloured dahlia in her hair, and the bloom and freshness on her face was of a child newly awakened. Feeling radiantly happy, it was not without sincerity that she exclaimed it was the greatest day of her life.

"Would you put fox-hunting as high as that?" he asked, with tepid curiosity.

"I didn't mean the hunting only. I was thinking of the whole thing. Your uncle . . . and the gate I jumped . . . and being with you here . . ." With some embarrassment she added: "and the fog."

"I see," he said, looking away from her.

Neither of them spoke. Dinner was announced. They sat down in a dark room lit by high candles and Octavia observed several pictures of horses painted by Stubbs and an old coloured map of Newmarket upon the walls.

After discussing books and other topics Greville asked Octavia if she played the piano. She told him she did, but that she would rather have played the violin.

"I think it's more responsive. The piano never seems to breathe, does it?" she said.

"No, it doesn't; but the violin never ceases to shudder, which I find intolerable. Do you like modern music?"

"I've heard so little; but I like what I know."

"What I mind so much is the amount of journalism there is in art of all kinds to-day; there is a sort of moral vulgarity about it. No sense of inevitability in music. Lack of dignity and patience. It is full of jumps and jars. Then they are so insistent! If you don't like some of the almost childish discords which occur between passages of beauty, they seem to say, 'Don't you like it? Well, you *shall*!' and they go on repeating the same phrase till you can hardly bear another note."



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"The few people I meet who like music, say they only care for classical music. When they say that, I don't believe they're really musical. I love every kind of music, from Bach and Beethoven to the vulgarest valse. There is something suspicious about people who say they only care for good music," said Octavia.

"There's a great deal of rubbish talked about music; only a little less than is talked about pictures. You have to master the phraseology to understand half that is said or written about either of them. For the moment we are going through a perversity in criticism which would be alarming if it wasn't ridiculous. Indiscriminate praise is as tiresome as indiscriminate abuse, and critics cease to convince when their opinions become obsessions."

"I suppose you hate exaggeration. I confess I have a certain sympathy with it!"

"I like economy of emphasis, and find over-statement, whether in art, music, or conversation, excessively boring. I've heard beautiful singers ruin every song by their tremolo; and violinists who think they make up for their horrible scraping by the swing of their hips, or the emotion they display by shutting their eyes."

"I would like to have had a wonderful voice. Do you sing?" asked Octavia.

"No, I wish I did; but I'm consoled by remembering what Beaumarchais said about songs, '*Ce qui est trop bête pour être dit, on le chante!*'"

"How excellent! I wish I had said that; it's odd how even great song-writers like Schubert set music to such rubbishy words. I know ever so many poems that if I were a composer I'd like to set to music."

He looked at her:

"You're well educated, are you?"

"How can you say anything so ridiculous? We weren't educated at all! I've got a lot of tastes, that's all."

"Well, that's a great deal. I don't believe there is a

person in this neighbourhood who ever opens a book, or who would recognize 'God Save the King.' "

"Mrs. Brabazon reads a lot. She's much cleverer than you think."

"She couldn't possibly be cleverer than I think she is. She has succeeded in making fools of us all."

"How funny you should say that! I never felt I was at all clever till I talked to her!"

"That is what I complain of. She makes that impression upon everyone."

"You're quite wrong. I can see that though I've only been with Mrs. Brabazon for four days I know her better than you do. After all, you haven't seen her for two years, have you?"

"That's true," he said. "Shall we go?"

When they went into the next room Greville refused to play the piano, he said he preferred to talk; after which there was a complete and embarrassing silence.

Fearing the look of lassitude in her host's face indicated that he was bored, Octavia said:

"Let's see if the fog's gone."

"You're thinking whether you'll be able to hunt or not," he said, getting up. "I expect your thoughts are always on to-morrow."

"I'm sorry to seem contentious, but you're wrong again! No one was ever so alive to the present as I am," said Octavia, without moving from her chair. "Why don't you play to me?"

"I don't want to play. Let's see if the fog has gone."

They walked to the window and pulling back the heavy curtains put their elbows on the upholstered window-sill. Side by side they looked out upon the landscape. Dimly perceiving the outline of trees, Octavia said:

"I believe after all I could have gone back to St. Mildred's—the fog isn't so very thick."

"If you regret it we could still go. It's only ten o'clock."



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"I expect they'll all be in bed," said Octavia.

"I don't suppose the servants will be asleep. Someone will sure to open the front door. If you really think you ought to go there's nothing easier!"

"Just as you like!" said Octavia, without moving.

"It's as you like!" he said.

"I suppose you think people might say it was odd for two strangers to spend a night alone in a country house together, do you, Mr. Pelham?"

"I never thought of that, but it's possible. I see you think conventions are not made for nothing, Miss Daventry."

"Me conventional? I suppose you're trying to be funny. All I can say is you have very little insight if you think as badly of me as that! But perhaps you are thinking of yourself. I should be sorry if I should in any way injure your reputation! By all means, let's go to St. Mildred's. Shall I ring the bell?" she said, walking away from the window.

"I was always told you have to know people for seven years before you can ring a bell or poke a fire in their houses," said he, following her.

"Then you also think conventions have a purpose?"

"I shall not contradict you. I'm never so anxious to prove myself right as to be so, which is more than I can say of many of the people that I argue with."

"Are we arguing?" said Octavia.

"No. We're merely discussing. Well, which shall it be?"

Octavia was not at all sure if he was speaking in earnest or in jest when he put his hand on the bell.

"If I'm not disturbing you I would rather stay," she said. Looking at him with a pleading expression and placing her hand on his, she took it off the bell.

"You are disturbing me very much," he said, scrutinizing the little face so close to his own. Holding her hand in both his, he said:

"This had better be good night, hadn't it? You look tired."

"I'm not a bit tired. Do play just one thing before you send me away, and then I'll go to bed."

She threw herself down upon a sofa and Greville arranged the pillows behind her.

He sat down and played the Bach Fugue in C sharp minor that she had listened to on the top of the staircase.

When he had finished, he turned round and looked at Octavia. One of her arms was tucked under the cushion and her head was thrown back. Lying on the floor were the borrowed shoes and the dahlia that had fallen out of her hair. She was fast asleep.

Opening the door stealthily and without noise he returned to the sofa. For some moments he stood looking at the shadows under her closed lashes, and the parted draperies of his dressing-gown; then, stooping down, he lifted her in his arms and carried her up to her bedroom.



## CHAPTER VIII

### *THE POSTPONEMENT*

**T**HE fog had lifted when Octavia arrived at St. Mildred's the next morning, and though her thoughts were not entirely centred on it, she had no further doubts but that she would be able to hunt with the Bragg.

Mrs. Brabazon got up from her writing-table when Octavia came into the room.

"You gave us an awful fright last night!" she said, "as, having got your first message, we expected you would turn up for dinner. Luckily Sir Harry, who is the most considerate of men, sent word that the fog was so thick it was doubtful if you would get back; after which we got a message from the post office that he was putting you up for the night. I hear you had a wonderful run. Poor Brab was left at the Rushingford, which he says your horse flew like a swallow. I *am* glad your first day was such a success!"

"I'm the happiest woman in the whole world!" said Octavia, embracing her hostess. "You are the most delicious creature I've ever met! I'm sure every man is in love with you."

"I don't know about that; but tell me, didn't you find Sir Harry a delightful person? Was he nice to you?"

"He was perfectly charming. I believe if it hadn't been for him I should have ridden Kilmallock to a standstill, and never found my way back either to his house or any other—but would have been wandering in the fog all night."

"If that had happened I should have had a terrible scold-

ing from Robin—for, as you know, he has got a very ticklish temper.”

“Has he? I’ve never seen him angry.”

“Then you’ve never seen him out hunting: but I assure you he has. I may be a more provoking person than you are—do you ever lose your temper?”

“I don’t get angry with horses; but I’m very passionate.”

“Are you passionate, Octavia?—I should doubt it. Tell me, what did you talk to Sir Harry about?—you must have had a long *tête à tête*; but I daresay you were dog-tired and went to bed early. Did you?”

“I was ever so tired! and felt chilled to the bone, groping in the fog; I hadn’t much talk with Sir Harry.”

“Do you mean to say you went to bed directly after dinner?”

“Oh no, but Sir Harry didn’t go home with me. He went on hunting; there was no fog when I left him.”

Octavia could see that Mrs. Brabazon knew nothing of what had occurred; and, remembering the photograph of Greville Pelham that she had seen in her bedroom, felt a certain embarrassment when she said:

“They must have had another gallop, as Sir Harry was too far to get back to Chivers and stayed the night at a place called Frisby. He telephoned to his butler to tell him to expect me.”

“Do you mean to say you spent the night alone?”

Octavia wished she had explained earlier in the conversation exactly what had happened, as it might appear to Jessica as if her uninforming answers were being reluctantly dragged from her.

“Oh no; Sir Harry’s nephew arrived yesterday from Florence. He was there.”

“Greville Pelham at Chivers! How long did he say he was going to stay?”

Jessica Brabazon pulled Octavia down on the sofa, and with an expression of concentrated interest continued:



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"Tell me exactly how he struck you—didn't you think him a strange, good-looking creature?"

Octavia felt an unaccustomed reserve creeping over her, and longed to get up and go away; but she thought if she did anything stupid her hostess might imagine there had been more in her encounter with Greville than she wished to divulge, so she answered:

"He's got a wonderful face; and I thought him a suggestive talker. He knows all about music, and is interested in heaps of things. I should say he might teach anyone he took the trouble to a lot about the problems of life."

"You won't say that when you know him better. I should never look to Greville for guidance; the problems he solves are those of his own creating. As a matter of fact, he is extremely green. Although he has travelled, he has seen little of the world, and knows nothing at all about a lot of things."

"What, for instance?" asked Octavia.

"Well, women," she replied.

"That's true; I think I noticed that."

"Why?—did he talk about women to you?"

Annoyed with herself, and remembering what he had said about Jessica, Octavia answered rather gauchely:

"He said most of them could make fools of—of—anyone they choose to. I don't think he likes women, do you?"

"Do you know, it's such a long time since we've met that I hardly remember. You can't find out much from letters, can you?—anyway, you liked him; I like you to care for the people I like. We must persuade him to come here, for as he goes nowhere, and never hunts, there is no other way of meeting him. Do ask him to come, Octavia."

"Why not write and ask him?"

Mrs. Brabazon was on the point of saying they had not corresponded for two years, when she remembered what she had said about the unsatisfying knowledge you got from letters, so she said:

"I certainly will. I shall be curious to see what you think of him when you know him. I adore Sir Harry, and only wish he could have inoculated his nephew with more of his own elastic and understanding nature."

When Octavia left the room Mrs. Brabazon sat down and wrote to Sir Harry Pelham.

Greville Pelham was the son of Sir Harry Pelham's only brother, and as Sir Harry had never married, he was regarded by the world and his uncle as the heir to Chivers. His father—who had died when he was a boy—was a very different type from Sir Harry.

Oliver Pelham was what Carlyle would have described as "a pollarded man." Solid, narrow, and unworldly, his interests were neither in hunting, literature, or art. The only books he read were books of reference and statistics; and, like many people who are engrossed by mankind, he disliked individuals. Having refused the family living, he had been content to live on the modest allowance of a squire's younger son. Late in life he married a woman much younger than himself—the daughter of a rich manufacturer—and he and his wife had spent the greater part of their early married life in Sheffield.

Plunged from a world of sport—which he had always detested—into the dull squalor and blind energy of a northern manufacturing town, he thought of nothing but how he could alleviate the sufferings of his fellow-creatures. In all his activities he was assisted by his wife, a woman of character and refinement who shared his ardent political convictions. But Mrs. Pelham's interests were not confined to the betterment of the poor. She was musical and artistic, and out of deference to her tastes and wishes her husband had bought a villa in Florence where they retired now and then to enjoy what little holiday they allowed themselves.

When Greville's father died, his mother moved to London, and continued to the best of her ability some of her



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husband's work; and had her child not been the heir to Chivers she would have retired from a world that she had neither known nor lived in. But her love for her son was an all-absorbing passion; if their natures were different, their tastes were the same.

Greville had been a restless, thoughtful little boy, and during his father's lifetime he had lived entirely with grown-up people. This had accentuated his self-absorption, and he had not the faculty of making friends. He spent some of his holidays at Chivers, but these visits were brief; and the formative influences of his boyhood were very different from those which usually surround a Squire's heir. After leaving Oxford he read for the Bar, but his tastes being literary and political, he made up his mind he was not suited for a legal career. He was pursued by the memory of the dingy dwarf houses and stunted figures he had seen as he drove through street after street on his arrival home from his first school. Nor could he forget the hideous houses of the rich that disfigured the suburbs.

Deep in his heart was born a hope that perhaps he might be destined to set straight some of the inequalities he had heard discussed, and he was never tired of asking questions about the conditions of the workers. He had inherited, besides the musical and intellectual tastes of his mother, his father's organizing powers, and he ultimately determined to put them at the disposal of the Co-operative Movement. The work appealed to his combative instinct as well as to his public spirit. The idea of fighting against the tyrannical sweater and acute man of business gave him a sense of silent satisfaction.

In spite of these leanings, Greville was not pedantic. Under an exterior of lassitude he had considerable muscular strength, and when not working or travelling, would go for long walks by himself, which suited his lonely disposition.

Inspired by a hungry desire to benefit mankind, and endowed with an unshakable faith, the inexplicable facts of

life outraged him inwardly, and he met opposition with impatience. Without being aware of it, Greville was a self-indulgent man of simple tastes with an unsatisfied nature. His conscience was elevated and sincere ; but he was the son of an old man, and his youth had been darkened by the indignation he felt for the sordid world by which he had been surrounded. When he was over-strained, he would escape from his work to compose music, or read books on philosophy and politics in the healing retreat of his mother's villa. He disliked the hunting world and never felt at ease with his uncle.

Sir Harry was a Tory of a resounding kind and had been the chief supporter of the member who had represented Harbington for twenty years in the House of Commons. Although he prided himself on his width of mind and never said an injurious word against his enemy, his political convictions were narrow and immovable. When people criticized the Tory Party and said it was behind the times, his chest expanded and his temper—at all times courteous—would be aroused to a pitch of oratorical eloquence. To encourage education was an extravagance ; to believe in reform a myth ; and to love the poor a pose. Every departure from his own political creed he called “cock-brained legislation.” When twitted for being out of sympathy with progress and the people one day in the club, he replied : “My dear fellow ; I’m all for the people—damn ’em !—but I wouldn’t educate them—blast ’em !” Forgetting that this was a quotation, he genuinely believed it was his own.

Good-humoured, generous, and gallant, he loved good food, good wine, and the society of pretty women. He was the best heavy-weight rider in England, and patronized every game and sport, from cards and cricket to boxing and hunting.

He had little patience with views and enthusiasms which he felt certain would bring his heir and nephew into conflict with what he considered the normal opinion of an English



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gentleman. He had never cared for Greville's parents; and though he saw little of his widowed sister-in-law, he was reminded of the profitless discussions he had had with his brother when he heard Greville dilating upon the inequalities of opportunity as between one class and another.

In spite of Sir Harry's opinions, he was fond of his heir, and had never given up hope that he would in course of time lure him away from his settled habits and make him worthy of the place and position he would inherit.

Being a man of the world, he was encouraged in this hope when he observed the fascination Jessica had exercised over Greville. He thought it a good education for any young man—especially a lonely opinionated person like his nephew—to be brought into contact with normal society, and a proper preface to an appropriate marriage that he should have a trial trip with a woman of the physical attractions of the chatelaine of St. Mildred's. It was a disappointment when he saw what looked like a promising liaison come to an abrupt end, and he feared there was nothing he could do which would bring them together again.

On receiving Mrs. Brabazon's letter, he was delighted and surprised when, after informing his nephew, Greville had replied in a tranquil and unmoved manner that he would be glad to accept the invitation.

The day before they were to arrive at St. Mildred's Jessica received a letter from Robin Compton:

*Thank God I can get away and am free. I shall travel straight to Dashington and hunt with the Bragg on Friday; and if it suits you I will hack over to St. Mildred's after hunting. Perhaps you can put me up for a week or so after that; but if you are full, I enclose a prepaid telegram to my stables, as I can easily stay with Jack Cuthbert. Haste,*

*Yours as ever,  
Robin.*

As the last thing Jessica Brabazon desired was that

Greville should meet Robin, she sat down and filled in the telegraph form :

*Regret impossible to have you. House crowded. Enchanted to see you later for as long as you like.*

She was a little disquieted when, after telling Octavia that Robin Compton had proposed himself to St. Mildred's, she said :

"You know them both, Mrs. Brabazon, much better than I do, but I somehow think Robin Compton will not get on with Mr. Pelham. We would have more fun if they were to come here separately."

"Why do you think that, Octavia ? It's true Greville doesn't like hunting people, but that can't be helped. If we had to consider the company he would most like to meet, we probably ought to invite the Labour man who preaches down here ; and neither Brab nor I, or even you, would enjoy that."

"Oh ! I don't know. I think, from what I'm told, Mr. Waterborough might interest us."

"You don't suggest, darling, that Brab and I should encourage a field preacher here to entertain Greville Pelham, do you ?"

"He might be a good buffer if the two men don't hit it off together," replied Octavia.

"What makes you think they won't hit it off ?"

"I don't really know ; but somehow I think Mr. Pelham would irritate Robin Compton. They're so different. I don't think they would ever understand one another, do you ?"

"I don't think they would ; but Robin ought to be able to accommodate himself to everybody."

"That's true ; but I think it's for that very reason Mr. Pelham would dislike him. I don't think he likes accommodating people." When Octavia said this she remem-



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bered the word "urbane" which he had used as a criticism of Jessica ; so she quickly added : " Have they ever met ? "

" Yes, they know each other a little. Your instinct was right ; they don't like each other, so I've told Robin he can't come here till next week. His stables are in Dashing-ton, and he can stay with the Master of the Bragg. Jack Cuthbert is his greatest friend, so I've arranged it. I believe Robin arrives from Ireland to-night ; you'll see him out hunting to-morrow."

Jessica did not feel too happy over what she had done, but she was determined she would get her first interview with Greville Pelham over as soon as possible.

When Robin proposed himself to St. Mildred's, he took it for granted that the answer would be a warm and welcoming " Yes " ; and he felt disturbed and angry when, on arriving at the " Beer and Skittles," he read Mrs. Brabazon's telegram, and received a message from the Master of the Bragg saying he was expected at Cranley. Considering he was responsible for Octavia's introduction to Harbington, it was unthinkable that Jessica should have put him off. How ridiculous to say St. Mildred's was crowded !—that certainly could not be true. What could it all mean ? And what about Octavia ? If she had really wanted him, Jessica could never have postponed his visit : as against that, she might have been afraid of letting anyone see that she was impatient to meet him.

But what harassed Robin was the idea that possibly Octavia was not thinking about him at all. He knew from a long experience how concentrated she was upon anything she was doing ; at Dunross she had hardly listened to what he or anyone else said when Professor Horncastle was talking. He had never been jealous of that friendship, or indeed of any other ; but he was aware that his chief attraction for Octavia was his horsemanship, and the bond between them that he had enabled her to realize her ambition of hunting in England. He doubted if that bond would stand much

strain. He had been in two minds as to the wisdom of introducing her into the society of Mrs. Brabazon and her friends ; but he had warned Octavia never to confide in a woman, and as her knowledge of her own sex was negligible, he felt sure his warnings had not fallen upon deaf ears. He had more than one reason for not wishing her to be too intimate with her hostess ; for although he had every confidence in Jessica's reticence, he felt that if Octavia had to have her eyes opened about the temptations of life he would prefer that her instructress should be of a less worldly nature.

Among all his hazards and pursuits, successes and defeats, Robin had never been attracted by a girl before ; and he felt a certain pride, anxiety and responsibility in having discovered and launched such a lovely and adventurous apprentice. What did she know of men and women, the world or its wickedness ? All the books she had read could not give her more than the most elementary knowledge of any of these things. He was haunted by the memory of the conversation he had had with Mrs. Daventry when she had told him Octavia was not susceptible, and had asked his advice as to what he thought girls should be told before they married.

Octavia was little more than a child and his right place was beside her. It was hard to have missed her first day's hunting, but harder still to think she was in no hurry to see him. It seemed a strange reversal of positions that he should remember the morning walk with an almost remorseful intensity while to all appearances it had left but a passing impression on her. He wished he could have found an excuse to motor over to the Brabazons to satisfy himself that Octavia was the same half-child, half-woman of the lovely morning in the beech wood.

These thoughts crowded into his mind as he drove from the "Beer and Skittles." The gravel crunched under the motor and jumping out at Cranley, he said to the chauffeur :

"Tell Melville to come up for orders after dinner."



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Jack Cuthbert knew Robin Compton and everyone else that hunted in the neighbourhood with baffling understanding. He had seen every world in his time and had settled down ultimately to a contented bachelorhood. Endowed with the insight you expect to find in women, he was seldom wrong in his estimates of his fellow-creatures. When people said, "I can't think how it is, Cuthbert, you are so clever about people," he would reply:

"You might as well say it's clever for a pointer dog to point! I'm made that way."

He had no missionary spirit, no indignation, and never wanted to alter anybody. He not only took people as they were, but delighted in every variety of the human species, and was one of the few men who loved Robin Compton.

Sitting alone together after dinner, he said:

"Well, old man, you missed a wonderful day with the Harbington. I've not seen such a good run for years! That Kilmallock horse which I wanted for Vince is a fizzer. By God! you should have seen Miss Daventry jump a gate at the end of the hunt, when we were all galloping down the road out of Barleymow village. Old Sir Harry doffed his hat to her as if he had been Raleigh in front of Queen Elizabeth. You must have schooled that horse thoroughly over timber. The animals I get from Ireland hit rails till the tears come into my eyes, though Bloodstone has come on a lot since you saw him. By the by, what happened to the Havoc horse? Did you buy him?"

"Yes; I bought both of them, but I'm not sure Octavia Daventry will be able to ride Havoc. He's got an awkward mouth and is dangerously excitable. It was as much as I could do to keep my temper on him."

"But you've got an infernally bad temper with horses, my dear fellow, and would have ruined Bloodstone if I hadn't bought him from you. Who is Miss Daventry? Is it true that she never saw a fox or a hound before Tuesday, and that it really was her first day's hunting?"

"Quite true. She's a Scotch girl—you remember her brother Joe that came over in the ship with us?"

"The fellow we played bridge with?"

"Yes, that nice-looking chap with curly hair. I met him shooting at Glenrath and he took me to his place on the Border two years ago. They're a jolly family, and the shooting is first-rate. None of the brothers ever look at a horse, but the girl Octavia has ridden since she was a baby. I think she's got the finest hands I ever saw."

"She must have; and what a pretty creature! I was grateful to her, I can tell you, for if Kilmallock had refused that blasted brook I should have been in it. Smithson went in, and one or two of the other chaps; that's how we got our start. Fancy the Master being there at the finish. I believe his flirtation with Mrs. Brab has been the making of him."

"Oh! that's come on, has it?"

"Very much; Brab, I'm told, is taking up a strong line about his Sunday visits. I know which I shall back in that contest!"

"Jessica's a great goose to worry Brab about the Master. He's got a sentimental attachment for him, and I shouldn't be surprised if this time he gets the best of it. I don't believe she cares a damn for Coventry. He's a dull dog, though I can't help rather liking him," said Robin.

"I think it's stupid of Brab to fuss. Surely by now he must know all about his wife, and it doesn't need a Columbus to tell us anything new about Coventry. He's got a sort of boorish charm, though he's a perfect oaf, and I doubt if Jessica is able to suppress her yawns with the same success in his company as she does in yours and mine. Of course, one can never tell what attracts a woman to a man, can one? The only fellow she ever really cared for was that nephew of Sir Harry's, that delicate, serious-looking chap who plays the piano. You know him, don't you?"

"I only just know him. Disagreeable, didactic sort of fellow," said Robin, "but clever, I suppose."



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"I daresay he's the sort of man who in the society of mugs like you and me—who never open a book and only know Jorrocks—passes for cleverer than he is," said Cuthbert.

"I expect you're right. He's not much of a sportsman, but in spite of his lackadaisical appearance, they tell me he's athletic. It's hard to believe, as he's as thin as a wafer."

"Oh! I don't know. He's pretty well made. If you look at his shoulders, though they slope they're muscular, and he's a good mover. Don't you remember when Brab was entertaining the Colonials two years ago and we were at St. Mildred's—the night we betted that he wouldn't jump on to the mantelpiece? We were all rather drunk, and . . ."

"I wasn't the least drunk," said Robin, interrupting him. Wishing to change the conversation, he added: "Brab has got the best champagne in this country. I wonder where he gets it. You might find out. I'm not wedded to champagne, but after a day in the Harbington jungles it's almost a duty to drink."

"I daresay you weren't drunk, but Tilbury was feather-stitching along from the dining-room, and even Sir Harry couldn't prevent him laying a hundred to one against Pelham jumping on to the mantelpiece. Jessica was looking her best; I never saw her in such form. I remember it like yesterday. She put her hand over Sir Harry's mouth and urged his nephew to take every bet. I was ass enough to go one better than Tilbury; and I'm damned if he didn't do it! I daresay there's more in that fellow than we think. As for Jessica, I shall never forget the expression of anxiety on her face when he got up with that curious languor from the bottom of his chair and said he always obeyed his hostess. It was after that that I had no doubt she was in love with him. Have some more champagne, old man, you look tired."

"No, thanks," said Robin, pushing back his chair. "Melville's waiting to see me."

## CHAPTER IX

### *THE INTERVIEW*

**H**AD Jessica Brabazon married a cleverer man, her enterprise and talents would have made her conspicuous in any world from Buckingham Palace to the Old Kent Road ; but, as it was, she had to content herself with conquering the hearts and upsetting the even rhythm of a sporting world, which left her a dissatisfied, unoccupied woman.

The first check in her conquests had come from her friendship with Greville Pelham, to whom she had been introduced on one of his visits to his uncle, and both her vanity and self-confidence had been wounded by him.

Up till the time of their acquaintance she had fitted her heart to her flirtations. The trifling but repeated complications of her early married life, and the small deceptions she had resorted to, had frittered away much of her sensibility, and to escape her husband's clumsy censure she had devoted her energies to Harbington and the neighbourhood, where her satisfying successes had smoothed her life into—if not a perfect, at any rate a tempered whole. She was too self-indulgent to permit herself to be unhappy, and too good-humoured to be easily bored, and a combination of intelligence and laziness had enabled her to put all the "might-have-beens" behind her. From circumstances rather than choice, her life had led her into a community of fashionable and unthinking people, and when she met Greville Pelham she realized for the first time the dullness and limitations of her surroundings. He was as new to her as she



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was to him. Starting on an intellectual basis, their friendship had developed into a passionate intimacy before she was aware of the temperament and character of the man she was laying herself out to please.

Greville's first experience of women had been an unfortunate liaison in Paris, sufficiently disillusioning to make him vow he would keep free of entanglements, and when he met Jessica he was suffering from diminished vitality and a shaken faith.

She was so different from any woman he had ever seen that he endowed her with qualities she did not possess; and her refinement, sympathy, and intelligence brought him back to a world that he thought he had eschewed. He noticed the effect his playing made upon her, and her interest when he discussed the responsibilities that people of profundity must feel towards life. He was certain that, without her saying so, she was animated by the same ideas that captivated his own mind.

Finding her surrounded by what he considered an atmosphere both suffocating and uncongenial, he felt that, if not by his love, he might at any rate by his ideals reveal to her the undeveloped possibilities of her misunderstood nature. To him she was a woman of sensibility, sacrificed to a commonplace husband; and without being aware of it, he had fallen a victim to the questioning appeal of her childlike eyes.

Owing to his work, he had been kept in London, and for over a year Greville and Jessica saw each other on every possible occasion.

Colonel Brabazon—like most husbands who are discharged or disposed of—was usually jealous of the wrong man; and finding his wife's new interest made her kinder to himself and gentler with everybody else, he had encouraged her friendship with Greville Pelham.

One day in the course of a conversation, Sir Harry—for whom he had the greatest respect—had said to him:

"My dear Brab, I can never thank you enough for your kindness to my nephew. This Co-operative business has prevented Greville seeing and knowing the world he will some day have to live in. There's a lot in him, but he takes himself too seriously. Jessica's chaff and cleverness is very good for him."

"Young men nowadays take nothing seriously, and I like Greville. He is good for Jessica: he fills gaps in her life."

Sir Harry looked at him.

"My dear fellow, I've always said you were a wise husband. Women are like horses, and should never be ridden on the curb. Your wife is happier and calmer than I've ever known her: I can see you understand one another."

Flattered by this remark, Colonel Brabazon replied in a tone of modest gratification:

"I think Jessica and I understand each other better than we did. Your nephew is a bit bookish, but between us we'll make a man of him."

This affair had culminated in an incident which had taken place two years before Octavia's visit to St. Mildred's.

When Colonel Brabazon was in London, his wife had given a dinner-party at which her guests had drunk freely of their host's champagne.

After winning bets from the Master of the Bragg, Robin Compton, and Tilbury, that he could not jump on to the mantelpiece, Greville got carried away in a discussion, first upon the morality of gambling, and ultimately upon politics. Jessica—half out of mischief—supported Robin and Sir Harry. Challenging his opinions, she wounded Greville by insinuating that he was a prig. At this he lost his temper, and when they retired to bed Greville went upstairs without saying good night to her.

Overwhelmed with remorse by the expression of puzzled pain on her delicate face, he wanted to make sure he had not alienated her friendship or hurt her feelings. After hesitating far into the night, he determined he would risk her



displeasure by a nocturnal visit rather than let her think him a pedantic, taciturn fellow, devoid of elasticity.

While groping slowly along the passage he saw the door of Jessica's room open, and he recognized by the shaft of light that the man who emerged from her bedroom was Robin Compton. The revulsion of feeling that this discovery made upon him was so great that he departed by the earliest train the next day, leaving a letter for Jessica to read at the late hour she was accustomed to have her breakfast. In vain she wrote eloquent and moving appeals of protest and explanation; her letters were torn up and unanswered, and beyond cautious enquiries to Sir Harry of his health and movements she had heard nothing of Greville Pelham from that moment.

The prospect of meeting him again filled Jessica with agitation. She was too clever not to realize that there is nothing so impossible to revive as a dead love affair, and when she re-read Sir Harry's note saying he and his nephew accepted her invitation, she was apprehensive and perplexed.

How would she meet the man who had loved her, and with what sort of feelings would he see her again? Would he be taciturn and dull? Would he be scornful and chilling? Would he purposely avoid all mention of their former intimacy and his two years' silence? Or would he be merely detached, and snub every effort on her part to explain things? . . . At the back of her mind a shadowy suspicion jostled these thoughts. Was it for her that the man she had loved was coming to St. Mildred's, or was it for Octavia? Did he look upon Octavia as a child or as a woman?

She longed to know more of what had occurred when they had been alone together on the foggy night at Chivers. They had had ample opportunity during a long evening to have formed some impression of one another. But Octavia—who was generally frank and outspoken—had shown a suspicious unwillingness to enter into details of what he had said to her, or she had thought of him, and Jessica had been obliged to curb her curiosity.

Greville's reflections were of another character. Octavia had had a strange and subconscious effect upon him, and the only thing that was clear in his mind was a determination to get his interview with Jessica over as soon as possible and start free ; free to pursue the new interest that had come into his life.

Uncertain of the attitude Jessica was likely to adopt, he resolved he would avoid all reference to the past, and what he had resolved to forget no one should remind him of.

Hoping to get his talk over before the return of his uncle, he arrived early at St. Mildred's ; and when Hawkins conducted him into Mrs. Brabazon's boudoir he felt as tranquil as if there had never been a difference between them.

Greville's calmness restored Jessica's self-possession ; but after they had exchanged a few negligible remarks she found herself regretting he was not in the humour she had both dreaded and anticipated. She had rehearsed this meeting from the moment she had heard of Greville's return, and had made preparations to encounter his scorn ; but her foresight had gone no further, and face to face with Greville's detachment, she was impotent. Tired of tepid generalities, she took her courage in both hands.

"I suppose you have completely forgotten me," she said, with an attempt at playfulness, and looking at him appealingly.

"You underrate my intelligence. I only forget what has disturbed me. I have a retentive memory for everything I have enjoyed."

"I'm not at all like that ; I'm haunted by misunderstandings, and can't enjoy anything till they're put right," she said.

"That's unfortunate," he replied.

"I've an almost childish desire to have things out. I daresay you think this ridiculous ; but it's my nature. I'm rash and impulsive."



## THE INTERVIEW

Greville was tempted to say she was, on the contrary, cool and deliberate, but checking himself said :

"I envy you ; rashness may get you into difficulties, but impulse is always an excellent excuse for getting out of them."

After this there was a conscious pause. Determined to make one more effort, Jessica said :

"Your silence in these last two years has been very cruel, Greville, but I suppose you thought it a good way of developing my heart and soul ?"

"I'm afraid I'm too indolent, even if I had the power, to attempt to convert anyone ; and know as little as you do about either your heart or your soul," he replied.

"I'm not as easily deceived about myself as you imagine. In two years the stupidest of us can change, though I dare say you won't believe this."

"No one has ever accused you of stupidity, my dear," he replied, raising his eyebrows with a slight smile.

The words "my dear" struck a chill into Jessica's heart, but she answered with as much gaiety as she could :

"You always said you hated clever people, Greville."

"I don't remember ever saying that ; I rather think it was one of your friend Robin Compton's aphorisms. Are you sure you aren't thinking of him ?"

"Robin is not half as stupid as you think. It's one of your prejudices that everyone who cares for fox-hunting must be half-witted ; but when you get to know Octavia Daventry better you may modify your opinion. She is just as fond of Robin as I am."

Remembering the Spanish proverb, "The tongue toucheth where the tooth aches," Jessica regretted her words the moment she had uttered them.

"Really ? Then she can't know him very well," replied Greville, roused from his apathy by the mention of a name that he was anxious to keep out of the conversation.

"I can see you haven't changed, and are as down as ever

upon people you don't understand. You think Robin Compton wastes his life, because he loves the world and prefers our society to more inspiring retreats ; but, after all, there is not so much difference between work and play unless they give you insight into other people. The great thing is not to deceive oneself in life."

"You might perhaps add, and not to deceive other people."

"What nonsense, Greville ! I never concealed from you that I liked Robin. You knew perfectly well that he was one of my earliest friends : that he came and went whenever he chose ; and that Brab and I looked upon him almost like a relation. You knew from our talks that adventure, recklessness romance—call it what you will—was what I was starving for. It was idle to pretend you thought a woman like me could be satisfied with the companionship of a man like Brab. I wouldn't have been myself if I'd suppressed every impulse to prove myself worthy of your love—a love of which I was only dimly conscious, and which proved to be both brittle and capricious." Jessica got up from her chair and, standing in front of him, continued : "I have never understood close, dull, unimpassioned people."

"Are you describing me or Brab ? " said Greville, looking with a certain admiration at the unusual flash in Jessica's eyes, and surprised at the emotion in her voice.

"I wasn't describing either of you. I was merely trying to explain the suffocation that surrounds my life here, and which I was fool enough to try and escape from two years ago."

"Isn't it a pity to go into all this to-day, Jessica ? I made a wrong entry, like a man who butts into a ' cabinet particulier ' when an unsuspected rival is entertaining his mistress. That's my excuse for leaving the house and banging the door after me two years ago."

The expression on Jessica's face hardened.



## THE INTERVIEW

"I've often noticed that men and women who've seen nothing of life think they're proving their knowledge of the world by always suspecting the worst; and that incidents of common occurrence, when brought to their notice, shock them like an earthquake! A spinster's surprise is never benevolent; and if I were to make a slip, I would rather it were discovered by anyone than a good man or a good woman. People like you are incapable of understanding hungry, unconventional, illogical women. You'll miss the greatest moments in life by only seeing things from your own narrow angle. You are full of theoretical pity for the whole world, but have *none* for individuals. I'm too old to be depressed by your amateur severity—but when you meet someone bold and young, take care that you don't kill her radiance or miss her meaning."

The moment the words were out of Jessica's mouth she knew she was conjuring up Octavia's image.

Remembering his past experiences, Greville was struck by the possibility that what she said might be true. He felt it would be unprofitable to proceed any further with the discussion.

"Your warning is probably well-timed," he said, and, relieved that her retort had been more defiant than tearful, he added: "Don't let's quarrel. You know I'm not susceptible." With a desire to put all suspicion of his feeling for Octavia out of Jessica's mind, he continued with a duplicity foreign to his nature: "I've only been in love once, and with a hide-bound nature like mine I don't propose to repeat the experiment. If you have changed, so have I. I'm quite ready to admit I was pitiless and unforgiving. You brought a great experience into my life. I daresay if it hadn't been for you I should never have emerged from a state of chrysalis. If our friendship has brought us sorrow, it has not been without compensations."

Jessica had too much knowledge of men not to suspect that Greville's good humour, and the ease with which he

was talking, came from the expelling power of a new affection ; but wishing above all things to end the talk on an intimate note, she got up and took his hand.

“ Thank you, dearest. You, at any rate, taught me that love affairs were empty things ; and if you will trust me now, Greville, you may be quite sure your trust will not be misplaced. You must try and take my follies at their face value ; I am too old to change. But if, at any time, you want my help, or my love, they are yours.”

Jessica's eyes filled with tears. She held his hand to her cheek and left the room.



## CHAPTER X

### *THE BRAGG*

**I**F Robin had been irritated and perplexed over the postponement of his visit to Harbington, Octavia's sensations were equally intricate. That her instinct was right—when she had told her hostess she thought they would have more fun if the visits of the two men could be made on separate occasions—she had no doubt ; but she wondered if this might not upset Robin, and awaken a suspicion that she was moving away from his tutelage and forming new attachments. She pondered over their relationship. Sometimes he seemed to treat her with the protection you extend to a child ; at other times inciting her as if she were a woman ; but there had always been something of authority in his manner towards her, and she was uncertain if this came from the difference in their ages or from his natural self-assurance.

The truth was that Octavia's first day's hunting had made an impression upon her in more ways than one, and she was beginning to doubt if she had been wise in allowing her intimacy with Robin to expand in the manner it had. A man so much older than herself was not likely to think of her as a marriageable person—there was, of course, no question of that ; but she did not want to spoil a relationship that she not only delighted in, but relied upon. She was prepared to take her own disappointments and successes in love as she would take falls in the hunting-field ; but she could not answer for other people. There was surely room for more than one man in her heart, and she would teach her men friends

that she wished them to apply the same idea in their relation to her. At Dunross she had had her own life ; but it was in a confined circle, and now that the opportunity had come, she would be lacking in enterprise if she did not enlarge its scope and develop its purpose. Determined to have a life of her own, she did not want it to be side-tracked by unnecessary complications.

Experience can never be measured by the calendar, and one day of emotion may lay the foundations of a greater change in the lives of men and women than the events of years.

Octavia was wondering how she would explain to Robin why his visit had been postponed. Would he take it for granted that there was no room for him ? It was for Jessica to account for a house the size of St. Mildred's being too full to admit of an extra person, and she doubted if with all her dexterity Jessica would be able to convince him of that. In any case, she herself would not tell him a lie. If questioned, she would say it had not been for a guest to decide.

Putting these thoughts behind her, Octavia dressed with scrupulous care for her first appearance with the Bragg hounds. Her success on Kilmallock had been sufficient to make her feel a certain trepidation, and she wondered if she would be equally at home upon Havoc. Robin would be there, and it would be disappointing if, on the first occasion they were out hunting together, he found anything to criticize in her horsemanship.

As the Bragg met a long way from St. Mildred's, Sir Harry had arranged to motor Octavia and her host on to covert, and they were awaiting his arrival in the hall.

Havoc was a very different horse in temper and character from Kilmallock. He had little conscience, no sense of humour, and, though perfectly fearless, was so irritable and uncertain that you never knew whether he would shy at a blowing leaf or walk up to an express train. Like the Princess in the fairy-tale, he could feel a crumpled rose-leaf under any amount of mattresses, and was so giddy and impression-



able that after a good day's hunting, though his legs never filled, they had to be bandaged to prevent him from nibbling at them. Easy activities performed out of mischief by Kilmallock became tortuous antics done out of swagger by Havoc, and he was as nervous and excitable as his stable companion was steady and wise.

In appearance he was a flea-bitten grey, standing under sixteen hands, with a short back, long shoulders, and powerful quarters. He carried his own little head and had a wild and roving eye. If you caught hold of him when he was going at a fence, his resentment at any interference with his mouth was as likely as not to make him go through instead of over it. He was too active to fall, but it was an alarming sensation to find yourself at the bottom of a ditch and out again before realizing what had happened.

It was after one of these experiences, when riding him with the Meath, that Robin had made up his mind that Havoc would not suit Octavia. But the horse had such quality and speed that he determined he would buy it for himself. Having searched all over Ireland for another hunter, he came to the conclusion that it was more than probable that a woman's hands would be better suited to his sensitive mouth than his own, and after writing full instructions to Merlin as to how to bit him, Robin sent Havoc to Harbington.

But Merlin was vain ; and although he had a great respect for Robin Compton's opinion, he had a greater belief in his own ; and on the morning the Bragg were to meet at Sturry gorse he had put a bit on Havoc of his own choosing and which he felt sure would suit him.

Before arriving at their destination the motor slowed down, and Octavia saw Merlin on Tattersalls leading Havoc to the meet. Sir Harry put his head out of the window and instructed him to stop at the cross-roads.

"What a good-looking horse that is of yours !" he said.  
 "If you make a mistake to-day you will not be able to conceal

it. I never had but one flea-bitten in my stables, but he was so conspicuous that he made my reputation—such as it is. There is always one horse in your life that you can take liberties with ; but if you will allow me to advise you, you will keep an eye on Jarvis to-day, as he knows every inch of the country. You know Jarvis, the dealer, don't you ? ”

When Octavia said he had spoken to her before jumping the Rushingford brook Sir Harry said he was not only the finest rider in the country, but a wonderful man in an emergency.

There were not many horses at the cross-roads. Havoc stood as still as a statue when he was mounted, but at the meet there appeared to be an even larger galaxy of people than there was at Stanton Starkey, and Octavia looked everywhere among them to distinguish the figure of Robin Compton. She was not aware that when he stayed with the Master of the Bragg he generally joined hounds at the covert side, as his knowledge of fox-hunting was too professional not to know where to stand, and neither Vince nor Cuthbert minded telling him which coverts they were going to draw first. As she was speculating whether he had been detained in Ireland, Sir Harry approached her and said :

“ I want to introduce you to the Master, Miss Daventry.”

Cuthbert touched his velvet cap and eyed Havoc.

“ D'you think he's as good a horse as the one you were riding Tuesday ? ” he asked. “ I rather doubt it. I'm told he's a light-mouthed puller, so you must feel your way with him. No gates into the road to-day till you know if he can jump timber, Miss Daventry ! ”

“ Who told you he was a light-mouthed puller ? ” said Octavia.

“ Robin Compton told me all about him last night. In return for that, I told him all about you and your first day's hunting.”

“ I hope what you said was to my credit,” said Octavia. “ *Do* say my ears ought to have tingled ! ”



"You wouldn't have me betray a conversation with my best friend, would you?"

"Is Robin your best friend?" she asked.

"Yes, I think he is; he's the finest rider I ever saw; and I've a very soft corner for people who ride well. Haven't you? Hullo, Jarvis! Is that the horse you think I ought to buy for Vince? 'Ware heels! 'Ware heels!" said the Master, addressing a young gentleman in mufti with a red bow in the tail of his horse that was backing into Havoc's quarters. "He's a nice-looking horse with a lot of fashion about him, but I think we ought to bribe Miss Daventry to sell us one of hers."

Jarvis lifted his hat to Octavia and said:

"I hope your horse wasn't tired on Tuesday, miss? I'm afraid the fog must have made it difficult for you getting home."

Octavia assured him Kilmallock was as fit as a fiddle, and after a little conversation the hounds moved off. The moment they moved, Havoc was in a frenzy of excitement and quite unable to go straight. He backed first into one, then into another horse, till Octavia thought it wiser to let everyone pass her. Merlin came up to her and said:

"'E always does that—even at exercise. It'll be all right when 'e's off the road. If you don't move a eyelash you'll disappoint 'im. 'E wants you to take notice. Let me come the other side; 'osses never like dog-carts."

At this moment a lady driving in front of them pulled up to talk to some of her Dashington friends, and Havoc stood on his hind legs and put his forefeet on the splashboard; at which Merlin jumped off and, seizing him by the head, brought him down on to all fours.

"Take off the curb-chain," said Octavia; "he doesn't like his bit."

"It's only his play, miss," said Merlin, wishing he had obeyed Robin's instructions.

"There, there! You mean business this morning, don't

you ? ” he said, taking off the curb-chain and patting Havoc on the neck with a confidence he was far from feeling.

Octavia knew, with the certainty that comes to all good riders, that she was on a horse over which she had little or no control, and was prepared to miss the morning hunt rather than upset Havoc for the rest of the day. Seeing hounds turn into the field that led to the gorse, she said to Merlin :

“ Open that gate and we’ll wait this side of the covert and see if they find. If they don’t, it won’t matter ; and if they do, I shall ride wide of hounds ; there’s no sort of hurry.”

When they got out of the road they kept wide of the gorse and, side by side, gazed at the view mapped out in front of them. Field upon field of the finest grass country lay at their feet, separated by flying fences, with an occasional spire to break the sky-line ; and to all appearances there was nothing to prevent the fox, the hounds, or the pursuers from running to the sea.

With the curb-chain removed Havoc felt more comfortable, but this feeling was not shared by his mistress.

“ I wish I was riding Kilmallock,” she said. “ I think Havoc’s a silly horse.”

“ Don’t say that. You’re just as impatient as the ’orse. I don’t believe there’s a better out to-day. ’E’ll be all right when you’ve shaken off the crowd. He ain’t everybody’s ’orse.”

Octavia observed some of the field moving down the covert side towards her, and a whip galloping farther up. In another moment she saw the fox creep out unobserved, and just as she was deliberating whether she could give a proper “ Halloo ! ” the whole pack emerged. Vince swept down like a swallow, encouraging his hounds with his musical voice before he steadied his horse and challenged the first bull-finch. A rush of riders dashed towards the point at which the fox had broken covert, and Octavia,



wishing to avoid the field, loosed her horse at the fence. Havoc was so elated that, on landing, he gave a jump almost as high as the place he had cleared, and for the next ten minutes they raced along over large and straightforward fences.

The hounds, glued to the line, kept together and were clearly running for blood. They swerved towards the road, through a dense and hairy fence that looked at least seven feet high and impervious even to a bird. Octavia's heart sank, as, except for an ominous-looking stile in the corner, she saw no way of getting out of the field.

She perceived a man galloping at top speed towards the stile. He was riding a raking-looking chestnut, and a casual observer might have supposed his horse was out of hand, as only a maniac could have challenged timber at such a pace; but within ten yards of the take-off his horse checked as if he had been in a show-yard and bounded over the stile like a buck. His rider looked round to see who was behind him, and Octavia recognized Robin Compton. She tried to pull her horse straight before following, but Havoc, seeing someone in front of him, gave a bound and a rush and, taking off too soon, hit the top rail with great violence, and nothing but consummate horsemanship could have prevented him from landing on his head. On seeing who she was, Robin pulled back and, pale with fear, said:

"Who the hell gave you that bit? My God! I could wring Merlin's neck for disobeying me. At the first check I'll change it."

"Never mind, Robin," said Octavia, flushed with excitement and forgetting she had never called him by his Christian name before. "We're in for a good thing!—I hope to God they won't check. How wonderfully your horse jumped. If he had pecked, Havoc would never have got over. The spirit of emulation did it!"

"Damned little cocky-wax! What does he know about bits? I'll break every bone in his body. Look out,

Octavia ! 'They're turning,' said Robin. "There's a canal and railway somewhere about. Better keep down wind and don't touch his mouth."

But Havoc was too excited to take much notice of his rider, and had it not been for Jarvis—who, observing the situation, rode his horse so as to head Octavia off—she would never have turned.

For the next twenty minutes they found themselves among the large and intricate fences that always surround a railway. Robin noted with dismay that Octavia never at any moment in the gallop had full control of her horse. Havoc, having given himself a rap, did not put a foot wrong ; and in the company of Robin and the dealer Octavia felt deliriously happy.

Hounds, having settled to their work, kept on at a holding pace and had no intention of letting their fox give them the slip over the railway. Dashing along at great speed, they put a high flight of post and rails between themselves and their pursuers.

Robin was determined that Havoc should not jump any more timber till he had changed the bit.

"Pull round ! Sheer off !" he shouted to Jarvis. "My horse won't jump those rails. The fox is making for Gatwick wood."

Jarvis, having seen Robin's horse jump the stile like a stag earlier in the day, knew in a moment what he was intended to do.

"Pull round, miss," he said. "We'll hit hounds off better by avoiding the canal."

Octavia with difficulty did as she was told, but Havoc resented what he thought was circus work, and taking him out of his stride always had a disastrous effect upon his nerves. Clenching the bit between his teeth and cocking his ears, he passed Robin and the dealer, and galloping like a flash of lightning across a vast enclosure over a thick-set fence, he dashed into the army of second horsemen. Octavia



## THE BRAGG

jumped off, only too thankful to be alive. It was the first time a horse had ever run away with her, and though too exhausted to speak, she felt exhilarated.

The Bragg had been running for over forty minutes, and she knew the hunt would be over the moment they got into a wood. In any case, nothing under Heaven would have made her go on. She sat down upon a hummock and lit a cigarette.

Merlin, who was standing with the second horsemen, was unnerved by seeing his mistress careering towards them. He informed his companions that the horse was full of corn, and that it would not happen again; a piece of information as much for his own benefit as his hearers, who, having seen Octavia's triumph on Kilmallock, were wondering why she appeared so helpless.

The Bragg hounds ran into Gatwick wood, where, after changing foxes several times, they gave up the hunt. The second horsemen scattered to find their masters, and the diminished field were exaggerating their experiences and eating their lunch.

Octavia was wondering whether she had disappointed him when Robin came up to her. After cursing Merlin, he asked Octavia if she would like to get on his horse, as the chestnut, steadied by the run, was a safe mount for her.

"It's a pity to go in," he said. "You're miles away from Harbington. This horse'll carry you like a bird. You can pull his head through his chest now he's got his second wind. I never take him to the meet, as he always makes a fool of himself with other horses. He's a bad starter, but you can't rope him down."

Octavia replied she would never dream of riding such a valuable animal, as she might spoil his sale, and said she would hack Tattersalls back to Cranley, where they had left the motor.

"Sir Harry said I might keep his man out all day. He and Colonel Brabazon are finding their own way back."

"I suppose you're disappointed with Havoc?" said Robin, looking at her.

"Not at all. I'm disappointed with myself, Mr. Compton."

"Why 'Mr. Compton' ? I thought it was to be Robin," he said, handing her his flask.

"Well, Robin, if you don't think me chicken-hearted I think I would rather go back now. I shan't be home till tea-time, and my arms ache. D'you mind ?"

"Very much ; but there it is !—I'll get over and see you soon. You rode remarkably well ; but Havoc won't stand that bit. I'll bring over the only thing I think he'll go in. Anyway, say you aren't disappointed with the horses I've got for you. You're not angry with me, are you ?"

"Of course not. I'm over the moon with joy. You just wait till you see me on Kilmallock ! or on Havoc with the proper bit. You'll be ever so proud of your pupil. When have I ever been angry with you . . . Robin ?"

She pressed his hand and, signalling to Merlin, got on to Tattersalls. Walking by her side when they were out of sight of the field, Robin said :

"Who have you got at St. Mildred's ? Why is it too crowded to have me there ?"

"I don't know. Did Jessica say she was crowded ?" said Octavia. "The only people I know who are coming to-night are Sir Harry Pelham and his nephew."

"Greville Pelham ! Why, I thought he was selling beans in Sheffield," said Robin. "Do you know him ?"

"Yes," said Octavia. "I met him on Tuesday."

"Surely he's not taken to hunting, has he ?"

"Oh, no ! He doesn't ride. Good-bye, Robin. You're coming next week, and we'll meet before that."

"Say you're ever so glad to see me, and that I'm marvelously clever to have found you two such good horses," he said, holding her hand in both his and observing the shadows under her eyes.



"I'm ever so glad to see you, and you're marvellously clever to have found me two such good horses," she said, and kissing her hand to him she cantered away.

One of the pleasures of hunting in the big and fashionable countries are the rides home. As the fences are high and clean, and the going hard and springy, horses do not suffer from the same troubles as those that are hunted over plough; their legs do not fill, and if it is a bad scenting day they are fresh enough to gallop home on wide stretches of grass at the sides of the roads. One of the surprising things even in well-bred horses is their desire to get home. They will leave the best of company on the finest of days to return, not only with alacrity, but with excitement, to the dullness of their own stables. Tattersalls, having done nothing all day, galloped back to Cranley with his hind legs well under him and his ears cocked as if he had heard a "Halloa!" Octavia felt refreshed by the rhythm of his even and elastic stride.

Refusing all offers of food from Cuthbert's well-trained servants, she ordered Sir Harry Pelham's motor.

Upon her arrival at St. Mildred's the butler informed her that Mrs. Brabazon was resting, but had given instructions to say that she would be down in an hour.

"If you want tea earlier, Mrs. Brabazon says will you order it for yourself and Mr. Pelham, miss."

"Has Mr. Pelham arrived?" asked Octavia.

"Yes, miss; he's in the sitting-room."

"All right, Hawkins: tea in an hour will be quite soon enough for me."

Avoiding the door of the sitting-room, she ran two steps at a time up to her bedroom.

In spite of what she looked upon as a failure in her horsemanship, Octavia felt unaccountably happy. The thrill of adventure over her first experience of a horse running away with her, and the knowledge that had she interfered in any way with Havoc she might have had a disastrous accident, gave her a feeling of inward satisfaction. There is nothing

more exhilarating than the humour you are in after a danger escaped, and Octavia came to the conclusion that she had a charmed life.

The thought of meeting "Master Greville" filled her with excitement, and a hundred new emotions were playing round her heart. She wondered if he would greet her with embarrassment, pleasure, or coldness. She longed to know if she had made anything like the same impression upon him as he had made upon her, and whether he had looked upon her as a woman or a child when he carried her up to bed. If he had thought she was a mere child tired from a long and exhausting day—his action was easily explained; but, after all, she was seventeen, and no one could suppose you were not grown up at that age. It was a disturbing reflection. She tried to interpret the expression of his eyes when, after laying her upon the bed, he had stood and looked at her; but he had left the room too quickly for her to visualize it.

Jenkins was waiting at the top of the stairs.

"What will you wear to-night, miss?" she said, following her into the bedroom.

Octavia's eye fell upon the Chinese dressing-gown.

"Go and have your tea, Jenkins," she said. "I'll wear my rose taffetas."

She did not want her maid to see how long it would take to pin the flowered *crêpe-de-Chine* round her, or observe the trouble she was about to take with her appearance.

There was one line of action she was determined not to repeat. She remembered the morning walk in the beech wood, and vowed that she would never again assume a dignity she did not feel; nor would she allow Greville Pelham to think she had taken the incidents of the night at Chivers too seriously.

When she opened the door of the sitting-room she found Greville alone, and so absorbed in the evening paper that he did not hear her enter. She leant over the back of his chair



and, stretching her arm over his shoulder, put a hand across the paragraph he was reading ; at which he turned with a start and got up from his chair.

They stood for a moment changing eyes. Then Octavia spoke :

“What is it you are reading that is so interesting ?”

“I see there is to be a by-election here. The Tory member is going to be made a peer, and a Labour man I know is going to contest the seat.”

“How thrilling ! Who will the Liberal be ?”

“I doubt if they’ll find a Liberal to stand ; but Waterborough’s such a fine fellow that, if he gets in, he’ll work for the best things in Liberalism, just as he’ll work against the foolish things in Labour. He’s a strange, inspired sort of fellow—a kind of visionary. Though poor, he’s well educated and reads all sorts of books. Talking about public opinion, he said to me : ‘In Voltaire’s letters you’ll find he says you should work for the little public. The true public is always a minority, the rest is the vulgar.’ It would be strange if a man like this were to get in ! But I’m told that things have changed down here, though I don’t suppose he’s really got a chance. Poor Uncle Harry ! and the Master ! All Harbington will be up in arms. I confess I would give anything to see him win !”

“Waterborough !—the man who preaches in the open air here ? How did you come to know him ?”

“It’s a long story ; I’ll tell it to you some other time.”

Octavia looked up and saw Jessica.

“Well, darling, how did you get on ?” she said, kissing Octavia.

“We had a tremendous hunt ! I scraped through ; but without much credit, as Havoc runs away with me almost at a walk. He’s so strong I doubt if I shall ever be able to ride him. Robin Compton says Merlin was a fool to put such a light bit on him. He knows the horse. You see, he bought it in Ireland ; he warned me . . .”

Mrs. Brabazon did not want to talk about Robin, so to change the subject she said :

"What a lovely tea-gown ! Doesn't she look charming, Greville ? You must never give it away. Those sort of Chinese things last for ever." Seeing a look of self-consciousness rare to Octavia, she continued : "I'm not flattering—I really mean it."

"I shall never give it away," said Octavia, looking at Greville. "Do tell Mrs. Brabazon what you've read in the evening paper."

"I was saying when you came into the room that a Labour friend of mine—by name Waterborough—is going to stand for Parliament here, as old Watson Whitty is going to be made a peer."

"Do you know Waterborough ?" said Jessica. "He's been down here for the last six months. Do you mean to say it's fixed ? What an outcry it will raise ! But surely no one but a Tory has the slightest chance of winning in this part of the world. It will take a brave man to challenge the convictions of Harbington, Dashington, and every clergyman in the county."

"He's an interesting fellow. I must introduce him to you."

"My dear Greville ! Brab would never allow that ! As for the Master, perfect as he thinks me, he would look upon it as a public duty to cut me, and the doors of Stanton Starkey would be denied to me for ever."

"Are they so political down here, Mrs. Brabazon ?" said Octavia. "I didn't know they were interested in anything but fox-hunting."

"They're interested in themselves. They like what they're accustomed to. I don't know a single Liberal, except Susan Malet and the innkeeper of the 'Anchor and Dolphin.' I suppose you will canvass for him, Greville ? Your father's a Liberal, isn't he, Octavia ?"

"I should rather think he was ! We all are ! And if you



lived at Dunross you'd be a Socialist. Ever since I was a child I've heard papa abuse the Tories."

"That's not so very long ago, my dear! How old do you think Octavia is?" said Mrs. Brabazon, turning to Greville.

Octavia, feeling that much depended on his answer, gazed at him.

"I'm not good at guessing people's ages," he replied gravely. "Sixteen or seventeen, I should say."

"I am seventeen," she answered.

At this moment Sir Harry Pelham and Colonel Brabazon came into the room. After kissing his hostess's hand, Sir Harry said:

"We are to have a by-election here, and you'll hardly believe it, but that preaching fellow is going to be put up. What days we live in! My father would turn in his grave at the thought of this county being contested by Labour; but unless I'm mistaken there is little chance of the Conservatives losing the seat. You, my dear boy," he said, turning to his nephew, "no doubt hope he will win."

"Equal opportunities for us all, and that sort of thing, I suppose," said Colonel Brabazon. "As if anything could make us equal!"

"I shouldn't worry over that, Brab dear! We're singularly equal down here. Possibly Waterhouse—or whatever he's called—will give us our first opportunity of being unequal, which might be all to the good. What d'you think, dear Sir Harry?" said Jessica.

"Come, come, Mrs. Brab! I won't allow you to range yourself on the side of Labour, or we shall certainly lose the seat. I hear it suggested that Guy Coventry should be put forward as a local man of influence! It only shows the ignorance that always prevails at Headquarters whenever there is a by-election; if he were adopted, it would be a walk-over for Labour," said Sir Harry, expanding his chest.

"He wouldn't do badly," said Colonel Brabazon. "After all, he's an English gentleman."

"There are such a lot of English gentlemen, I wonder if that is the best qualification for a seat in the House of Commons," said Jessica with a yawn in her voice.

"Guy may not have brains, but he's got something better. I don't think for a moment he'll consent. He's a bit tongue-tied and you want confidence for this sort of business. Anyhow, he's an Imperialist," said the Colonel.

"What does that exactly mean?" asked Octavia.

"It means hating every country but your own, darling," said Jessica. "Imperialists are people who have been round the world in great luxury *once*, and know nothing whatever about foreign nations. The French are frogs, Germans louts, Rumanians savages, and Russians barbarians."

At this, Greville Pelham, fearing the conversation might develop into a discussion in which he would lose his temper, interrupted her.

"It would be amusing," he said, "to collect phrases about international reputations expressed in the vernacular. For instance, 'Faire Suisse,' to have a drink without offering one to your companion; or 'Dutch treat' where you each pay your own share; or 'Dutch courage' or the French equivalent for our 'French leave': 'filer à l'Anglaise.' And there are many others."

"All I care about," said his uncle, interrupting him, "is that our fellow should be an Imperialist, a Protectionist, and put the Trade Unions in their proper place."

"If that is all that is needed, dearest Sir Harry, you will have no difficulty in selecting from a hundred candidates in this part of the world," said Jessica. "Now we must go and dress for dinner. Susan and Tilbury are coming."

Turning to Greville, Colonel Brabazon said:

"I've hardly spoken to you, Pelham. I hope you're staying for a bit and have brought lots of books. You know what the life is down here."

"Many thanks," said Greville, opening the door for his hostess.



## THE BRAGG

Collected round the dinner-table, the conversation was divided between those who talked of the day's hunting and those who were interested in the by-election.

"Linger-longer-Lucy played the fool to-day," said Tilbury to Mrs. Malet, "tossing me about like a pancake and then refusing water the width of a Bryant and May. She's a damned funk and not worth the straw she stands on!"

"I was speaking to Grubb and Gibbins. They don't think Waterborough has a chance; but they all tell me he's an extraordinary speaker—more like a revivalist, and quite out of the common," said Sir Harry. "They talk about the influence of the Press, but it has nothing like the same influence over people as the power of oratory."

"I believe in the power of the Press," said Colonel Brabazon. "You can't overrate it. I don't think there's a man down here who takes in a Liberal paper."

"Quite true, darling. They don't even take in *The Times*," said Jessica.

"Well, my dear, the *Daily Telegraph* has very sound opinions," replied her husband.

"She takes me for a porter, and expects me to carry her fiddle-head. I was a jackass to buy her and must hand her on to some hero in the plough. I say, Miss Octavia, that flea-bitten of yours is a fizzer, but you put the fear of hell into the second horsemen to-day! My yokel told me you nearly killed him; not that that would have mattered, for I would willingly subscribe to his funeral. Silly poop! My horses are as soft as sweetbreads; his hands are so heavy that when I get on them their mouths are as full of foam as meringues are of cream!"

"I didn't see you, Lord Tilbury," said Octavia. "I mean—there was such a crowd, wasn't there?"

"How can you see any of us poor devils? You're always in front."

"Being run away with, you mean," she replied.

"It's their advertisements that make newspapers pay and not their opinions, isn't it?" said Jessica.

At this, Lord Tilbury joined the general conversation and, speaking across the table, said:

"I read two advertisements to-day which amused me. The first:

*Wanted, a strong donkey, to do entire work of country clergyman,*

and the second:

*Bachelor in business would appreciate joining cheery family in absolute first-class home. Anywhere to the west or north-west of London. Roomy stables essential.*

Would you have replied to this in my favour, Mrs. Brab?"

"I certainly would if you think 'cheery home' describes St. Mildred's," she answered.

"By God, I do! It's the cheeriest house I know." Looking at Octavia, he said, "You don't think of committing suicide just yet, do you, Miss Octavia? Though I wouldn't answer for Pelham; but he has always had a touch of Hamlet. Philosophers despise people like you and me."

"Do you, Mr. Pelham? I thought the essence of philosophy was tolerance," she replied. "If you will only take in pupils, Lord Tilbury and I will come and stay with you. Will you chaperone us, Mrs. Brabazon?"

Jessica felt a poignant longing to have had youth upon her side as she looked at Octavia, as fresh as a flower in her rose-coloured dress.

"You may be certain I will," she said; "but I have every confidence in Tilbury."

"Not much of a compliment, Mrs. Brab, I fear," he replied.

"My dear Mrs. Malet," said Sir Harry, "I believe you



## THE BRAGG

are a Socialist. You and Waterborough should hunt in couples. D'you mean to tell me you've been to his meetings ? ”

“ Yes ; and they were most interesting. Of course, I don't always agree with him, but I understand his point of view. He never says a stupid thing.”

“ By the Holy Moses ! then he's not the man for me ! ” exclaimed Tilbury.

Greville Pelham, who had hardly opened his mouth during dinner, said :

“ I heard him speak in the East End of London. He was discussing the position of the King.”

Colonel Brabazon put down his knife and, looking profoundly shocked, said :

“ You don't mean to say you didn't get up and leave the meeting, my dear Pelham. Everyone knows the King's name should never be mentioned in politics.”

“ On the contrary, I went home with him, and that is how we got to know each other,” replied Greville.

“ Do tell us about it,” said Octavia.

“ It will be awfully interesting ! ” said Tilbury, with a suppressed yawn.

“ If you've finished, I think we'll go ; Greville can tell us about it another time.”

Mrs. Brabazon got up and, accompanied by Octavia and Mrs. Malet, she left the room.

When the men came out of the dining-room Octavia was so exhausted that she was glad Greville did not come up to her, and felt nothing but relief when Tilbury pulled a chair up to hers and sat down.

“ Robin Compton says you're the best rider in England, and, by Jove ! he's right ! ” Lowering his voice and pulling his chair closer, he continued with an expression of ecstatic admiration : “ All Harbington were talking of you Tuesday, and, by God ! I expect all Dashington will be doing the same to-night.”

## OCTAVIA

Mrs. Brabazon, observing a look of ill-concealed boredom on Greville's face, said :

"I want Greville to play to us. Octavia is too tired to talk. You hate music, Tilbury, so you can go to the billiard-room. Let's go into the other room. You're fond of music, aren't you, Octavia ? P'raps you sing ? "

"Alas ! no. I would rather have had a lovely voice than anything in the world."

"Even than wonderful hands, Miss Octavia ? " said Tilbury, getting up to open the door.

Octavia asked her hostess if she had ever heard what Beaumarchais had said on the subject of singing, and quoted : "Ce qui est trop bête pour être dit, on le chante."

"What a good memory you've got," said Greville, looking at her with his slow smile.

"There are some things I don't forget," she said as she passed him in the doorway.

"What will you play, Greville ? Don't just sit down and get up again. Play something serious and long," said Mrs. Malet, who was a musician.

"Something that will make you all go to sleep, I suppose you mean ? " said he.

"Now you are fishing for compliments ! Have you ever known anyone go to sleep while you were playing ? " said Jessica, turning over the leaves of various books.

"I regret to say it happened to me once," he said, looking at Octavia.

"It must have been a man," said Susan, "for we women always conceal our feelings when we're bored, don't we, Jessica ? "

"No, it was a woman."

"And what did you do ? Did you lose your temper and wake her ? " said Susan.

"I woke her," said Greville.

"How like you ! And was she furious ? "

"I don't know at all what she felt . . . What do you



## THE BRAGG

want me to play ? You've found what you were looking for, have you, Mrs. Brabazon ? Because if you haven't, I'll play a fugue."

Having failed to find the music she was looking for, Jessica arranged the cushions, and signing to Octavia to put her feet up, sat down beside her on a sofa facing Greville. They listened to the Bach fugue in C Sharp minor.

## CHAPTER XI

### *THE WALK*

THE next day, after a late breakfast, Octavia joined the men in the sitting-room. They half-rose to say good morning and then relapsed into their chairs. Sir Harry was writing letters, surrounded by the morning papers; Colonel Brabazon was examining a motor map, and Greville Pelham was buried in an arm-chair, reading and marking a book. They all appeared unconcerned.

Jessica Brabazon seldom came down before the gong sounded for lunch; and Octavia knew from the habits of the house that if she did not take advantage of the morning hours there would be no opportunity for her to have an uninterrupted *tête à tête*. Encouraged by his humour of the night before, she had an overwhelming longing to be alone with Greville; but as he had not looked at her when he said good morning, there was nothing to make her suppose he shared the same desire.

She reflected that he was not an easy man to talk to. His face distracted her attention and her mind felt like a slip-carriage when listening to him. But the conversation they had had about the by-election seemed to come between her and the evening at Chivers, and she did not want the memory of that meeting to be in any way dimmed. At Dunross she had always been the central figure in the conversation. Robin and the boys had made a sort of clique, and she had never been without an audience. The Professor had warned her against people who decanted themselves too freely; as



he said, in passing the bottle the wine might be spilt. Had she decanted herself too freely on that foggy night? She could not recall a single sentence of her conversation.

She looked at the mute book-shelves and undisturbed people, and wondered what she ought to do. Unopened letters from Dick and the Professor were in her pocket, and there was no reason she should not retire to read them; but she was not in the humour to read or write letters. She was consumed by a preoccupied and inner feeling of restlessness.

Walking to the open window behind Sir Harry Pelham's chair, she said:

"What a lovely morning!"

"I expect you wish you were out hunting," said Sir Harry, looking up from the writing-table. "I would have taken you with pleasure, but the hounds are in a bad country; and as you only have two horses, you must save them for next week. We mustn't let Robin see you on a tired hunter or he will mount you himself; and though he hasn't got a bad horse in his stables, they are none too easy to ride. He would be telling you all the time what he expected you to do, and be angry if you didn't obey him."

"Thank you, Sir Harry; but I'm quite glad not to be out hunting," said Octavia, adding without much conviction: "I've got ever so many things I ought to do."

At this moment the door opened and Lord Tilbury was announced. In a suit of large checks, and standing behind an enormous cigar, he walked into the room and looked at them with a quizzical expression. Observing the surprise of the company, he said:

"Nothing doing at Dashington to-day, and it wasn't worth while losing myself like a babe in the Harbington woods; so I blew in to have a chat and see your weight-carriers, Miss Octavia." Eyeing her with a sunny expression, he added: "Hope that won't bore you. You could force pine-apples in this room; it's a positive crime not to be out on a day like this!"

Greville raised himself languidly from his chair and, putting down his book, said :

“ You’re perfectly right, my dear Tilbury. I was thinking precisely the same thing. Let’s go and see your horses, Miss Daventry.”

Octavia wished the thought had occurred to him earlier, and, surprised at her unexpected visitor, she left the room.

One of the stories told about Lord Tilbury was that when reproached for throwing away his fortune he had said : “ I always try to live up to my income, even if I have to borrow money to do it.” But as heirs to large estates have been known to expect too much of their bankers, he was seldom out of a state of impecuniosity. He ate, drank, and slept too much ; but his courage, high spirits and generosity endeared him to everyone he encountered, and, although susceptible, he was not without a certain sort of shrewdness. He did not like Greville Pelham. All men who did not care for fox-hunting, and read books, were “ long-haired pompous prigs,” and knowing that he was engaged upon public work, Greville was the last person he expected to meet. He would never have dragged himself out of bed had he foreseen such an untoward situation.

“ Slept badly, I suppose, Tilbury?” said Sir Harry, looking up from his letters.

“ It’s a funny thing, but I can’t close an eye now after I’m called. I toss like a billow on the briny between the hours of nine and eleven. . . . Ah, here you are !—Miss Octavia has converted you, has she, Pelham ? You’re interested in horses, I see. Isn’t that new ? ”

“ Quite new,” said Greville, holding the door open for Octavia. Sir Harry heard Tilbury say as the trio passed under the open window :

“ Where did I get ‘ live and learn ’ from ? Oh, out of Shakespeare, I suppose, or a Christmas cracker.”

Strolling towards the stables, Tilbury’s slang and his



## THE WALK

small-talk faded, and he could think of nothing to say ; nor was Octavia in any way tempted to assist him.

Greville was anxious that they should all keep together, and showed an unsuccessful attempt to make conversation. His object was two-fold. He did not want Jessica to think he was interested in Octavia, and he doubted whether the night at Chivers had made a permanent impression. He felt instinctively that if Mrs. Brabazon's suspicions were aroused, it would destroy Octavia's confidence in her new friend and rob her of some of her youthful admiration.

Octavia resented a moment of the time she was not spending in the hunting field being wasted by an irrelevant visitor, and Greville's obvious desire not to be left alone with her did nothing to appease her resentment.

They walked along in the winter sunshine till the stables came in view. For almost the first time in his life Lord Tilbury was without resource ; and feeling the weight of the oppressive silence, he said :

"Hadn't we better go somewhere else ? Pelham loathes the sight of a horse, and to judge by the expression of his face might be going to a funeral."

"I entirely agree ; there's nothing more boring than looking at horses ; or at anything one doesn't want to see. Let's go to the garden," said Octavia.

"Just as you like. I'm equally contented wherever we go. One needs very little to make one happy on a day like this," said Greville.

They turned away from the stables and walked towards the gardens. Blackbirds flew into the shrubberies and the yew hedges were illuminated by a dazzling sun. Lord Tilbury broke the silence.

"I think I'll shoot off and see Mrs. Brab," he said, at which Greville stopped him.

"She won't be down yet. Let's go on and turn back at the iron gates, unless you're tired, Miss Daventry. What do you say ?"

"I'm never tired, thank you," said Octavia. "Why not go beyond the iron gates? It would be a pity for us to separate on such a perfect morning. There are many subjects on which I would like to hear your opinion, Lord Tilbury. What, for instance, do you think of the by-election?"

"I heard about it last night. What are the names of the Johnnies who are going on the war-path?"

"I only know one. Waterborough is the name of the Labour candidate," said Greville.

"I'll wager a pony he has as much chance of getting in as my mare Cunning Kate has of jumping Niagara! Hullo! there's Mrs. Brab."

With this Lord Tilbury, waving his stick, ran rapidly back to where his hostess was standing.

"Let's go too," said Greville, turning round.

"As you like. I'm equally contented wherever we go. One needs very little to make one happy on a day like this, and I would not wish to rob you of one moment of Lord Tilbury's society," said Octavia.

"You mustn't be hard on humble admirers. I don't suppose Tilbury has ever been up so early in his life before on a non-hunting morning. It's a compliment, I can assure you."

"How clever you are, Mr. Pelham! I'm surprised you thought I was even as old as sixteen . . ."

"I don't think I said sixteen . . ."

"You ought to have said twelve!" she retorted.

"If my memory serves me right, I said seventeen." Dropping his voice and stopping her, he said: "Will you go for a walk with me this afternoon?"

"Certainly not, unless you can persuade a third party to accompany us," said Octavia, and leaving him, she joined Lord Tilbury and Mrs. Brabazon.

Seeing Greville standing where Octavia had left him Jessica called out:



## THE WALK

"I'm going to see the gardener. Take Octavia to the summer-house. There's half an hour before lunch," and putting her arm through Tilbury's she turned him off the path.

"I'm afraid you'll think me terribly rude, Mrs. Brabazon, but I really must write my foreign letters," said Octavia, determined at all costs not to be left alone with Greville. She took off her hat, and shaking the hair back from her forehead, raced across the lawn to the house.

Alone in her bedroom she opened her letter from the Professor. No one wrote letters like he did, and, overcome with remorse to think she had only written one short line to him, she sat down at the writing-table.

*Beloved Professor,*

*I feel horribly guilty. I meant to have written to you directly I got here, but you've forgiven me so much that I know you won't fail me now. I am well and happy, though up till now I have been tremendously tired. I wonder what you would think of the hunting world? Mrs. Brabazon is a fascinating and illusive person. She's a little too agreeable, and surprisingly lazy, but I think you would love her. I believe she has read a lot, but a few books go a long way down here. I am convinced that it is impossible to read if one hunts four or five days a week; and when we meet again you'll find me ever so dull. You know my host, though you won't remember him. I forget him while I'm speaking to him, but he is the best of men. He says you met in Glasgow and that you made a wonderful speech. All the people I know who have anything to do with Colonies are ultimately dull, and Colonel Brabazon feels it his duty to be on countless Colonial Committees.*

*Mrs. Brabazon wants you to come here, but is afraid it would bore you. If you have to be in London when I come back after Christmas we might arrange to be here together. I get on quite well; but I have no audience—do you remember you said once*

## OCTAVIA

*that I always had an audience at Dunross and was in danger of making the sun a footlight? You warned me that if I did not take care I should lose the power of being happy alone. You needn't be afraid. Excepting yourself, I have ceased to want any audience and am perfectly happy alone.*

*There is one thing you must tell me when you write. Do you consider me young or old for my age? Don't fail to tell me this. I've made a new friend. I wonder if you would like him? He takes himself more seriously than he takes me, but he is more interesting than the others, and is somehow different. He says I'm inconsistent; but I told him consistency beheaded the Baptist, and you can hardly expect to find it in a reasonable woman. I don't think it's an enviable quality, do you? There's something complacent about consistency, and I like hungry people. I was born voraciously hungry.*

*Beloved Professor, write soon and say you don't want me to be serious, or satisfied, or calm, or consistent, or anything but your devoted Octavia.*

*P.S. His name is Greville Pelham.*

When Octavia had finished writing her letter she took it downstairs, and after putting it in the post-box that stood on a table in the hall, she walked into the sitting-room. Everyone was out, the windows and doors were open, and the house seemed deserted. Whether from over-fatigue or the morning disappointment it would have been difficult to say, but Octavia was suffering from the reaction that always came to her when the thrill of danger had faded out of her blood-vessels. For reasons she could not have defined she felt an overwhelming sense of depression. It had all been so perfect such a short time before. What was it that had changed everything? Why was life always presenting her with such violent contrasts. There was Dunross, with the beauty of the moors; the delight of her talks with the Professor; her games with Dick, her rides with Robin; the quotations in her Commonplace Book, and the puzzling



enigmas that she wrestled with under the rowans. Then there was St. Mildred's—the horses, the hunting, the triumph of her first day, the danger of the second, the letters unfinished, the books unread, and the night at Chivers. None of those things were satisfying taken by themselves. And it was precisely the same about people. There was Sir Harry, with his circulating smile, worldly wisdom, courtesy and kindness. There was Robin—idle, sympathetic, and brilliant on a horse; but he didn't care for music, he wasn't interested in politics, and he had no sort of moral ambition. It was true he was sympathetic; but except about herself what was he sympathetic about? She said to herself: "I'm convinced nothing wants more watching than one's sympathies. I ought really to try and be more like myself—and less like the person I'm speaking to. The only good I ever do comes from being sympathetic, and I'm afraid all the harm will come from it. I must not let my sympathies buttonhole me. I must try and get away from them, since they will never get away from me. If Robin really loves me, he ought to want me to be better; but he always thinks I'm good enough for *me*. Nothing could be more unsatisfactory!—A man like Robin ought to want the woman he loves to be good, as he certainly doesn't care if she's clever."

Her thoughts turned to Greville Pelham. He was a greater contrast than even her home or her horses; and no one could accuse him of too much sympathy. He disliked more than he liked; maintained his own point of view, and seldom praised anything or anybody. He seemed to think if people let their sympathies run to seed they would never bear fruit; but she would infinitely prefer them to bear flowers. And then he was moody. Perhaps he thought the same of her. She also had moods, and had shown an almost childish temper in the morning walk. Having guessed her age at sixteen, he had probably looked upon her as a child when he had carried her up to bed.

When the Professor answered her letter, would he say she was young ? It was a drawback never to grow up ; but if she was too young for her age Greville was too old ; indeed she had serious doubts if he had ever had any youth. No doubt people who liked horses and an out-of-door life, wasted their time, and were seldom intellectual, but they were, at any rate, human ; and after all that was the only thing that counted. They fitted into the small parts of life like two people playing bridge : each might have moderate cards, but the hands fitted, and together they were good enough to win the game. Greville despised the smaller things, and would doubtless say life was entirely made up of Big things, Great ideas, High aspirations, Heroic resolves, etc. For him life was not an adventure, but a crusade. Work should not merely be a means of earning our living, but the honour and making of our lives. This was all very heavy, and she was not in the humour for big ideas !—She only wanted little things : tiny little happy things. Some small human sign ; not a symbol to hang upon a wall and look at, or pray to ; but something that she could take down and hold in both her hands ; that she could say—as she had said when she was a child—“ This is my own : MINE, to keep.”

Tapping her teeth with a pencil Octavia looked out of the window and frowned at the blackbirds hopping on the lawn. Like a person with a temperature, she was exaggerating what she felt, and had lost her sense of proportion. Instead of consuming her own smoke she was photographing it.

She walked to the fireplace and took up the book Greville had been reading. Opening it at random she read the following passage, which he had marked :

*Ah, golden eyes, to win you yet  
I bring mine April coronet.  
The lovely blossoms of the Spring  
For you I weave, to you I bring.*



## THE WALK

*These roses with the lilies set,  
The dewy, dark-eyed violet,  
Narcissus and the windflower wet :  
Wilt thou disdain mine offering ?  
Ah, golden eyes !*

*Crowned with thy lover's flowers, forget  
The pride wherein thy heart is set,  
For thou, like these or anything,  
Hast but a moment of thy Spring,  
The Spring, and then—the long regret.  
Ah, golden eyes !*

Hearing the sound of footsteps, Octavia turned round and saw Greville Pelham.

"I thought we would not invite Tilbury to entertain us this afternoon ; but when you've finished writing you might come and talk to me in the morning-room. I shall be working there," he said.

"All right," she replied. "Tell me, who is this by ?"

"It's Andrew Lang's translation of Rufinus' lines to Rhodocleia, sending her a wreath of flowers."

The gong sounded for lunch.

"Well, how are the horses ?" said Sir Harry, seating himself next to Octavia.

"We didn't go to the stables, but I expect they're all right. Are the Harbington in a good country to-morrow ? If I can't ride Havoc I shall exchange him. I don't want to be run away with every time I ride him."

"I'm inclined to think you should put Jarvis on him, or Robin ; but he may go better in another bit. Horses that pull need weight in their mouths. Sharp bits are the greatest mistake in the world with a light-mouthed puller ; grooms never understand this. You remember, Mrs. Brab, that horse of yours ? He went like a child when you put a segundo on him," said Sir Harry.

Mrs. Brabazon was not listening. She was talking to Greville about America.

"The statistics of crime there are appalling. I may have got it wrong, but I read there were one hundred and two violent deaths per thousand over there, to four per thousand here. If that's true what can one think of the entirely United States!"

"A man told me the other day that no one respects the law in America. He knows the country, and says that till the law is properly administered and obeyed, the Americans will never be a great race. The trouble is that progress there has gone beyond civilization. They have commercialized and standardized everything, and killed all disinterestedness. It is no use turning pigs into sausages, or pressing a button to empty a drain! Improvements are worthless to human beings unless they are protected by the law, and allowed to be themselves," said Greville.

"I imagine their judges are underpaid. I know nothing about it, but am told the Bar governs the Bench in America. No one can deny they have great lawyers," said Sir Harry.

"I have never understood what makes a great lawyer. The famous ones I know have uninteresting, commonplace minds, and hardly any temperament. I suppose it's a separate gift, like making money in the City. Has any man of remarkable intellect ever made money in the City?" asked Jessica.

"I daresay Grote had an interesting mind. I suppose one should say intellectual men don't make money, but men of intellect do—though I know half-wits to talk to who have made fortunes. A lawyer's job is a very different affair. Above all else he must have the power to persuade. No amount of argument, no amount of reasoning, no amount of intellect will help. You must have something about you first to persuade, then to master, and then to win; as it's chiefly done by speech, you mustn't only have the power of per-



## THE WALK

suation in your speaking, but the power to inspire enthusiasm in your personality," said Greville.

"You seem to know a lot about lawyers, my dear chap. You ought to be a coach," said Tilbury.

"I started life as a lawyer and was a failure. I daresay I hadn't the brains, but I never had the powers I've been describing."

"Wasn't that long-haired, dirty-looking chap you had at lunch here a few weeks ago a famous lawyer, Mrs. Brab?"

"Do you mean Susan's friend, Stewart Scott? My dear Tilbury, he's particularly good-looking and not at all dirty."

"All I can say is that, like certain stuffs that are guaranteed not to wash, soap is wasted on him," was the reply.

When lunch was finished, Hawkins informed Octavia that Merlin wished to see her, and Lord Tilbury accompanied her to the stables.

"Afraid I bored you this morning, Miss Octavia. I observed Pelham a bit off his feed. I came to ask if by chance you wanted a horse this week, as my juggins says he has cadged about for mounts for me—which is what he's paid for—and has got enough horses for me to go on with. If you care to ride Cuning Kate she's at your service. She's not a swallow, but thank the Lord! there are no Rushingfords in my part of the country and you can loose her with confidence at any other barrier."

"It's ever so kind of you, Lord Tilbury. I know she's a wonderful mare because Miss Dawkins told me about her, but I think I'm all right for next week. Anyway, I'll let you know what Robin has arranged. You see, he's my teacher and settles these things for me."

"Lucky devil!" he exclaimed, "but there's not much he can teach you. I should say the boot was on the other leg, and he could learn a lot from you. Robin can speak French in a dozen different languages when he loses his temper!"

"So they say; but, do you know, I've never seen him lose his temper."

"He may not lose it with women, but with men and horses he can be very eloquent. They tell me he's wonderful with children."

"Do you mean to imply I'm a child, Lord Tilbury?"

"By gad, no! But Robin must think so if he's under the illusion he can teach you anything. Some day I hope the horse will be found that will teach him a lesson that he'll commit to memory."

"You're rather hard on him. I suppose you've got a very sweet temper?"

"It has been the ruin of me!"

"You mustn't say that. I think it's a lovable thing to have a sweet temper."

"By gad, do you? Then I shall never regret it. You don't really think I'm hard on people, do you? Why, if it's a good scenting day I pretty well like everybody. I expect you've got greater downs on people than I ever have."

"Would you say I was hard?" she said.

"On some things, yes."

Octavia looked at him with amused curiosity.

"What, for instance?" she asked.

"Stupidity," he replied. "You may think me a pretty bad judge, Miss Octavia, but cleverness isn't everything!—there are some stupid people that are not altogether to be despised."

There was a note in his voice that touched Octavia. Seeing his hack approaching them, she said:

"I entirely agree with you."

When the lights were lit, the fires made up, and the curtain-rings had been rattled across all the windows, Octavia went to the morning-room. Greville was sitting at a table, writing by the light of a single lamp.

"Tell me how you came to know Waterborough," said Octavia, sitting down near the fire and determined to keep the conversation impersonal. (He must not think of her as a woman, but as a man friend, to whom he could speak with



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ease and upon any subject. She would try and feel plain and not look at him.)

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and pushing his chair away from the table sat down facing her.

"It's very nice of you to have come, but it's a long story—I rather doubt if it will interest you."

"You seem to think I'm only interested in horses, Mr. Pelham. It's a mistake to make up your mind too quickly about strangers. They're sometimes nice."

"That accusation doesn't come at all well from you. I should hardly have thought we were strangers; but even friends don't listen well to long stories."

"Oh, I can listen to anything; I suppose you think I talk too much?"

"I like people who talk. I'm always accused of being taciturn, which isn't true, but I suppose living as much alone as I do gets me out of the way of general conversation. Shall I turn on the light, so that I can observe the expression of your face if I'm tactless?"

"Don't worry. I hate tact, and prefer the dark."

"But what am I to do if you fall asleep?"

"If you prefer it I'll talk, and you can go to sleep."

"An excellent idea; but if this should happen, will you promise you'll carry me up to my bedroom?"

Octavia felt glad that the room was not light, but remembering her resolve to be like a man friend, she said:

"Now go on, please; tell me all about Waterborough."

Greville feared he had said the wrong thing. He leant back in his chair.

"A year ago I went to hear Waterborough address a mixed audience. In the course of his speech he said that a constitutional Monarch was a contradiction in terms; and that it was asking too much of a man to occupy the humiliating position of the King of this country. To have a semblance of power without possessing it, was the rôle of a puppet, and he could not imagine any real man accepting such a rôle.

I was impressed by the earnestness of his face, and when the meeting was over I went round to the platform entrance. When he came out I asked if I might walk home with him."

"That was bold of you," said Octavia.

"Perhaps it was, but it was a chance I took as the speech had made a great impression upon me and I saw he was unconventional and sincere."

"Was he responsive?"

"He said he lived a long way off, but that if I was in sympathy with his ideas he would be glad of my company; so we trudged off together and had an excellent talk. I defended the King's position; and said it was as much to avoid the danger of democracy as it was to avoid the danger of a Dictator that the people of these islands have evolved for themselves the kind of King and Constitution they require. Acting on the advice of his Ministers doesn't make the King a puppet, because when he feels they are going against the public interest he can collect the opinion of his counsellors, and indirectly influence any teachable Prime Minister. We are a highly political race, and when majorities in the House of Commons diminish, and by-elections go against the Government, a King has a right to warn the Prime Minister that changes in the Cabinet are advisable if he wants to avoid the uncertain results of a general election."

"Did he understand that?" asked Octavia.

"Yes, he understood perfectly. I pointed out that no one would deny a King can exert a bad influence over society,—and society is a much bigger affair than the West End of London. A bad King can by his example encourage gambling, discourage education, despise religion, dread freedom, and insult Labour. He can start fashions that hurt trade and demoralize the public. This is much more than any puppet can do."

"I suppose Waterborough has a natural prejudice against the upper classes; and riches, and idle happiness, and all the lighter side of life."



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There was a faint challenge in Octavia's voice, for although interested in what he was saying, she could not prevent her mind from straying to her thoughts of the morning. There he was—back to big things again!—He wasn't talking *to* her, or *with* her; she did not exist for him.

"I don't think he is more prejudiced than the rest of us against idle happiness," he said. "As for the rich, he has never met any but the employers for whom he's worked. How can a man who has suffered, and seen suffering, know anything about *idle happiness*!—I was only concerned in explaining that he was wrong in not appreciating the way each part of our constitutional Monarchy fitted into the whole; and trying to prove that the ultimate tribunal lay in the hands of men like himself. I said the King was the head of the Army and Society, the Lord Mayor the head of commerce and the City, and the Prime Minister the head of the people; and all three have to pay a certain deference to each other. Even the bureaucracy of India is ultimately subject to the will of the people here. By their votes they can turn out the Prime Minister and have a change of government. The only authority either princes or rulers have is the confidence they inspire in their followers; and God Himself would hardly have the same power if the world ceased to believe in Him."

"I loathe Dictators!" said Octavia.

"No individual will be tolerated in this country who attempts to roundup people all walking at a different pace; and the best Labour Government in the world can't force men to keep step in the uneven march of life. I told Waterborough the majority of us believe in what the wisest combination of chosen men can devise, and not what the strongest individual can impose upon us. It is to avoid class-consciousness; the fears and selfishness of the rich or the poor, the ignorance of those who believe in force, and the arrogance of those who think power is everything, that we have evolved our Constitutional Monarchy, and it is because we believe

that in *that* service lies the only Freedom, that we acknowledge and serve our King."

"What did he say?" said Octavia, moved by his gravity.

"He asked me to go and see him. Would you like to meet him? He stays at the 'Anchor and Dolphin.' We might look him up one evening when you're not hunting. I shall go to his meetings."

"I would love that. Do you think Mrs. Brabazon would mind? I rather think she would."

"Are you afraid of Mrs. Brabazon?"

"I would hardly say that. She is ever so kind to me, but what you said the first time we talked about her seems to be true."

"What did I say about her?"

"Don't you remember?"

"I can't say I do. I hope it was neither harsh or foolish."

"Do you ever say foolish things, Mr. Pelham?"

"Don't be unkind. I'm just like the rest of the world."

"I would hardly say that. You aren't at all urbane," said Octavia.

"Ah yes, I remember now. You took exception to that expression, didn't you? But you're coming round to my opinion, are you?"

"I think her smoothness makes it difficult to catch tight hold. It's easier to know people who are more in and out."

At this moment the door opened and Jessica came into the room.

"Hawkins has given me a telephone message for you from Robin. He says he would like you to ride the Havoc horse to-morrow, darling, and he's sending Merlin the right bit for him. He wants you to ride on with him from 'The Rose Revived,' an old inn about three miles from the meet. I said if he didn't hear to the contrary you'd be there."

"Thank you. Yes, that's all right. I wish you had come earlier and heard Mr. Pelham describe how he first got to know Waterborough," said Octavia, feeling that what she



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was saying was more civil than sincere. "He's going to take me to see him one evening."

"That will be interesting for you, but I should say as little about it as possible, or you'll upset Brab. The prejudice down here against Labour is more than you can imagine. I believe they would rather have their honour suspected than their Toryism."

"It's a sad reflection on fox-hunting!—I could almost wish I didn't care so much for pleasure," said Octavia.

"Pleasure is a very relative term and I've never quite made up my mind what it is," said Jessica.

"I know *exactly* what it is! and I cling to every minute of it," said Octavia, with heightening colour.

"You are not only young, my dear, but very young for your age—isn't she?" said Jessica, looking at Greville.

"Whether I agree, or dissent, I shall be in equal danger of offending Miss Daventry. She was severe upon me for suggesting she might be sixteen or seventeen; so for the moment I shall only commit myself to saying she has been rather old for a very short time."

## CHAPTER XII

### “*THE ROSE REVIVED*”

ALL the time Octavia was dressing she was asking herself whether Havoc would be more rideable in Robin's bit. If only she got a start, and hounds ran straight, she felt all would be well. It was the crowd, the hanging about, the sudden checks, the sudden starts, and the indecision of the riders that she dreaded. Nor was she confident that any bit would give her the complete control of a horse like Havoc. A straight run, like a straight part in a play, was so easy ; but except in a novel when did a fox ever run straight ?

Pulling on her top-boots, she wondered whether Greville Pelham would stay on after Robin's arrival the following week. If they were there together, would she be able to make them understand one another ? If she failed to do this, her pleasure would be at an end. Why would it be difficult ?—Robin loved happiness, hunting, her, and what else ? When he took trouble he could express himself, and he was not without insight. What did Greville care for ?—From what she gathered from her talks with him, and his conversation with other people, he seemed to have a feeling of half-mourning about life. What were his aspirations ? Not trying to make anyone happy : he only wanted to make them good, and discontented. Hers were quite different. She wanted to *give* life ; to warm the blood and kindle the hope of drab and cautious people. You could not make others live unless you had life yourself. What good would his blood be if transfused ? If she were to explain all this,



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he would not listen. She was not an individual when she was with him, she was an audience—an audience that only came in at the end. When people clapped, was it the last sentence, or the whole speech they were applauding? Or was it merely relief that the speech was over?

Robin never listened to himself, he listened to her; but unfortunately he always clapped. Occasionally he asked for a few elucidations; but he seemed equally satisfied whether her explanations were reasonable or vague. He would never listen to a man like Greville Pelham. He would say: “This man is a kill-joy; he knows nothing of women, or fox-hunting; he isn’t human, and he comes between me and Octavia.” That, in itself, would be sufficient reason for him to make no effort to understand Greville. And how could she explain something she barely understood herself? . . . When she and Greville were talking about Waterborough only the day before, and she had been so anxious to feel ugly and like a man, she had heard everything, but had listened to little, and had even felt a certain irritation with him. He was not talking to her, he was merely dictating. She might have been a typist for all he cared.

Octavia’s reflections were stopped by a knock at her door. Jessica came into the room in her riding-habit.

“Brab says I had better get on at ‘The Rose Revived,’ so we’ll go together. Run and have your breakfast. We must start in half an hour.”

“I’ll be there,” said Octavia, redoing a recalcitrant tie.

Sir Harry was smoking a large cigar after an enormous breakfast. On seeing Octavia he said:

“I feared your political leanings would prevent you from hunting to-day; Waterborough is holding his first meeting as the adopted candidate. My nephew and Mrs. Malet are going to hear him; they are both great admirers of his speaking. Ah, Greville, here you are!—I was just saying you are chaperoning Mrs. Malet this afternoon. Are you by chance taking the chair?”

Lifting the covers off the breakfast dishes without looking at anyone, Greville said :

"I haven't joined the Labour Party, my dear uncle, nor am I the least likely to ; but I shall go and hear Waterborough."

"Let us hope," said Colonel Brabazon, "he will not abuse the King."

"Attacking an institution is not attacking an individual : Waterborough never abused the King. His manners are too good to do that."

"Manners are not usually the strong point of the Labour members," said Sir Harry.

"You won't find them as bad as the manners of the Tories. Personally I've found as much ignorance, and more insolence, in the Tory party than in any other body of political opinion."

Octavia looked at Greville's unaccommodating countenance while she pecked at her omelette. Sir Harry put the morning paper between himself and his nephew. When Hawkins announced the motor, he rose with the stiffness of men who have been sitting in well-made leathers and opened the door.

"I hope you'll enjoy yourself as much as we shall, Greville," said Mrs. Brabazon, coming into the doorway. "There is always a certain satisfaction in dissociating oneself from the frivolity of one's friends : and while Octavia is mastering Havoc, and I'm struggling to keep the hounds in sight, we shall be thinking of you and Susan applauding our new Member."

"Nonsense, Jessica ! I'll never believe people down here will lose their heads. . . ."

"I expect you're right, Brab ; they'll keep their stupidity as the Honourable Crasher described keeping his nerve," replied his wife.

When they were in the motor Octavia said to Jessica :

"Political feeling down here seems quite as acute as it is



with us. We're loathed at Dunross because we're Liberals—but it's odd to think in a place like this that politics should rouse so much feeling.”

“They don't, my dear! I doubt if the Master, Tilbury or Miss Dawkins have ever heard the name of the present Prime Minister. Living in the country reminds me of what a Frenchman said, ‘J'aime beaucoup les bergeries de M. de Florian, mais j'y voudrais un loup.’ No one down here reads or writes. They eat, sleep, buy and sell horses, walk to the stables and back, tap the thermometer, fuss over their top-boots, put ammonia in their baths; and such powers as they've got of conversation are exercised upon their stud-grooms. Nothing takes them out of themselves except an occasional scandal, or what is called a ‘costume ball.’ Greville and his uncle are the only people who care for politics, but Greville is serious about everything—even himself.—Do you like serious people?”

“I've met so few; but I can't imagine anyone not caring about politics. I would give anything in the world to have been a man! There's nothing I would love so much as to have been in the House of Commons. I would rather be a great speaker than a great anything else. Singers lose their voices, beauties their looks, athletes their activity, painters their originality, and poets their inspiration.”

“I confess I've never wanted to be a man. Purpose always bores me. I detest vigorous minds, and prefer subtle ones. I despise the public; shrink from triumph; and conquerors leave me cold.”

“I'd never have thought that of you, dearest Mrs. Brabazon; I should rather say you enjoyed conquests,” said Octavia.

“Perhaps you're right, darling; it would a little depend upon what battlefield.”

Robin Compton was waiting at the entrance of “The Rose Revived.” Only a close observer could have noticed the look of disappointment in his face as he opened the door of

the motor, and a tinge of coolness in his manner when he shook hands with Jessica. It was the first time they had met since Octavia's arrival, and he felt sore with her for deferring his visit to St. Mildred's.

"You've left your guests to amuse themselves, have you, Mrs. Brab? That's good. You must let me know if any of them are staying on, as I'm perfectly happy where I am. There's no greater bore when one's hunting than entertaining a large house party," he said, helping them off with their coats.

"They'll all have gone by then; unless Greville Pelham wants to stay. Do you know what his plans are?" said Jessica, turning to Octavia with a charming smile.

"I haven't the least idea," she replied, aware that both her hostess and Robin were looking at her.

With this she left Jessica in the inn, and walked across the yard. Octavia resented the appeal made to her as to Greville's movements, and hoped Mrs. Brabazon was not going to lay the blame of Robin's deferred visit upon her. She tried to remember which of them had been the first to suggest that the two men might not get on together, and came to the reluctant conclusion that though her hostess had sent the telegram to the "Beer and Skittles," she herself had been the first to say it. If Robin asked her how many guests had departed, what was she to say? These were what she imagined were called "white lies," and very tiresome she found them.

When Octavia was out of hearing, Jessica turned to Robin with an appealing look.

"My dear Robin, I can't thank you enough for sending Octavia to us; we all adore her. I love those high cheekbones in that little white Russian face; I've never seen such beautiful eyes, have you?"

She was aware that Robin was vexed with her, but her belief in herself was strong enough to feel certain she could smooth matters over. She could never remember the days



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when he had not been vexed with her. At one time even her husband had remonstrated with him about his temper ; but as she was convinced she was the only woman Robin had ever been in love with, she felt that an affection of such long standing was not likely to get permanently estranged.

“ I’ve no idea what you mean by Russian ! I should have said that she was exceptionally healthy and English. What are you riding to-day ? ” he said, throwing her coat into the motor.

“ I’m riding Storm that Brab bought in Yorkshire. She’s a gilt-edged security. Come and see her.”

As they walked towards the stables she touched his arm.

“ Don’t be cross, Robin,” she said ; “ it’s such a long time since we’ve ridden together.”

“ Oh ! Mrs. Brabazon, I think your mare is a picture,” said Octavia as they approached, and turning to Robin she added : “ She must give me the first refusal, mustn’t she ; I’m sure papa would buy her ? ”

“ Certainly, darling, or you can buy her at my sale,” said Jessica.

It would have been impossible to see more perfect horses than the three that were waiting to be mounted in the yard of “ The Rose Revived.” Storm was a long, low, bay mare, with black points, carrying a beautiful coat and quiet as a dove. She had never been extended ; she had never been excited : and the same compliments were paid to her every Tuesday with the Harbington, and every Friday with the Bragg. Robin’s horse, Steeple-Jack, differed in every way from either Havoc or Storm. He was black-brown, standing seventeen hands high, yet seemed close to the ground. He could crawl, and creep, and keep his head in the blindest of countries, and there was not an open fence he could not jump in his stride ; but he was a strong-mouthed puller, requiring a segundo bridle, and when out of temper, needed a hundred-acre field to turn him in. He had won several races, and was the apple of Robin’s eye.

“ Did Jester get over from Ireland all right yesterday ? ” he said, addressing his second horseman.

“ Yes, sir ; but he’s a bit off his feed. Mr. Melville thought it best for you to ride Steeple-Jack first to-day and All’s Blue this afternoon.”

“ You must be careful when you clip Jester. Don’t forget to tell Melville to throw him ; he won’t stand a noose round his nose,” said Robin.

When they had mounted, they rode out of the livery stable into the turnpike.

“ Don’t you think Octavia’s horses are rather big for her, Robin ? I should have said fifteen three was the right height,” said Jessica.

“ I like big horses,” said Octavia, noticing the expression of Robin’s face.

“ She can always sell them if she likes,” he retorted ; after which they rode along in silence.

It was a damp, windless day, and the bare hedgerows had a dewdrop hanging from every twig. Here and there a scarlet coat could be seen in the big enclosures that mapped out the landscape.

“ Do look at Smithson having a row with his horse ! ” said Jessica.

They looked to where she was pointing. On the bridge road leading from Dashington to the meet, they saw a young man in mufti trying to open a gate. Every time he approached it his horse swerved, and digging his toes in the mud started antics of an acrobatic kind ; first standing on his hind legs, then dipping his head he bucked and kicked with increasing ill-humour. Stopping to watch this performance they were caught up by several members of the hunt who reined back to see what would happen. Smithson was a hard-bitten fellow, and a magnificent rider. A young man from the Bragg galloping behind him shouted :

“ Pull out, Smithson ; my horse will open the gate ! ”

But Smithson would have remained there all day rather



than have the gate opened for him. He pulled his horse round and gave him one or two punishing blows down the shoulder with his cutting whip.

"He seems to have lost his temper," said Jessica.

"Not at all; he's perfectly right. If you once let a horse beat you he'll triumph over you for the rest of the day. You'll see, he'll make him jump that enormous fence just to steady him."

Robin's surmise was justified. To the admiration of those who had gathered on the road, Smithson cantered slowly away from the gate, and pressing his hat down upon his forehead, he put his horse at the biggest part of the fence. With a red face, and a look of the grimmest determination, he landed safely in the next field and joined the company on the road.

"That's an audacious good horse of yours, Smithson! Would he suit me?" said Robin, full of admiration.

"You've got to keep your temper when you hit him or he'll get sulky; he's fond of jumping, and has a turn of speed, but I'm not going to sell him."

"I thought there was nothing you wouldn't sell!"

"To tell the truth, I've given Cuthbert the first refusal; I think he would suit Vince. He's got the speed and the pluck, but huntsmen need something more than that, and I doubt if Gimcrack's teachable."

"Let me know if Vince doesn't buy him, and you want to part with him. Anyone can ride a good-humoured horse, but no one knows what goes on between you and a sulky one. His temper can't be so very bad, if he can jump like that after the hiding you gave him," said Robin.

Several riders joined them, and Mrs. Brabazon introduced Octavia to some of the members of the Bragg. Arriving at the meet one of Octavia's new acquaintances said to her:

"Are you fond of hounds, Miss Daventry? Because if you are I'll point you out the two best dogs in the pack."

"I don't believe I should ever know one from the other,"

she replied, looking at the hounds clustered round the Master.

"You see that one sitting up? He's called Tragedy, and was bred from a Belvoir bitch; and the one standing close to him is Render—they're both famous, and have got more dash, drive, and sagacity than all the others put together. There's a uniformity of type in the Harbington which makes you think they're alike, but I think those two carry the palm for symmetry. They've taught Haycock to leave hounds alone when they're at fault, which makes him the huntsman he is."

"I say, Jarvis, we shan't find in Claydon, shall we?" said Sir Harry, who had joined them.

"I don't think so, Sir Harry; but we're no distance from Ratcliffe Spinney, and if the fox heads towards the vale we ought to have a first-class gallop."

"Why don't you think we shall find, Mr. Jarvis?" asked Octavia.

"I don't know, miss, but foxes seem to fight shy of Claydon lately. On a day like this they'll probably lie out. I see you've got your horse properly bitted to-day. He seems more tractable."

"He's certainly quieter; but I don't find him easy; he goes so fast at his fences."

"There are oxers round about here, so it won't matter going too fast; if you come down you'll fall free. You must take your own line, and don't believe it when they say there's only one place in a fence, miss! It's the undecided ones who'll tell you that. Mr. Compton's on Steeple-Jack, and if you follow him I believe you can lay your rein on Havoc's neck, and you won't jump on anybody."

"How do you feel?" said Robin, coming up to Octavia and looking at Havoc. "He seems fairly steady. Stick close to me; I know every yard of this country. Where the devil are you going to, you fool?—Look out!—Look out!!"

This remark was addressed to a young man who was



riding a shoulderless animal and getting closer and closer to them. Lively and foolish, it was backing into Steeple-Jack’s quarters, and do what he would his rider appeared helpless.

“He’s a four-year-old, sir, and will be all right in a minute,” said the young man nervously.

“Take him away, Juggins!” said Robin, seeing Havoc trembling, and knowing that his own horse would have no scruples in lashing out. He was about to shower a cataract of curses when Octavia stopped him.

“It’s no good losing your temper, Robin, with the poor little chap! What can anyone do in a snaffle bridle? Let’s go on, the field’s moving.”

They hung about for some time round Claydon, but not a hound gave tongue.

“I wonder if it’s a good scenting day; we don’t often draw this covert blank. It’s a deceptive thing, scent; I’ve seen hounds run on a day as hot as Ascot, dust blowing off the road, and a blinding sun in the middle of the sky. You never can tell. Do just look at that for a country!—Sir Harry says that’s the finest vale in England.”

Side by side, Octavia and Robin gazed at the large pastures and quickset fences stretching at their feet, broken here and there by patches of gorse, and not a wood, a stubble, or a ploughed field as far as eye could see.

“Jarvis says there are ox-rails somewhere about here; will Havoc understand how to jump them? Will you shout at me, Robin?”

“I prefer oxers to those nasty bull-finches which mark your face like a German student, or put your eye in a sling! Come on! They’ve drawn blank,” said Robin, seeing Haycock starting at a brisk trot.

Two magpies closely following one another flew past them, and perched into a bare and dripping tree. Robin touched his hat as he and Octavia rode slowly on, lingering behind the crowd.

Before they reached Ratcliffe Spinney one of the whips was seen with his cap in the air. A ringing sound of "Gone away!!" broke upon their ears and a rush of horsemen obscured the pack from view.

Close together, and stride for stride, Steeple-Jack and Havoc sailed along and overtook the rest of the field. Seeing five couple of leading hounds racing down the side of the hedgerow in a sharp curve towards them, Robin said breathlessly to Octavia:

"Hold on! he's a traveller; and has no intention of going into the Spinney. Sheer off! Smithson's got his hand up; there must be wire . . . the fox is making for the vale! There's our place; look out for water!"

Pointing to a high stake-em-bound he took Steeple-Jack by the head in a grasp of iron and steadied him on to his hocks. The horse hunched up his back, and landed clean over the top of the fence on to a slope leading to a row of willows. Havoc, who was immediately behind him, cocked his ears and jumped the place like an antelope. Passing Robin with the speed of an express train, he made for the brook. Octavia knew enough not to tamper with his mouth, and they landed on the other bank with a scramble; after which Robin caught her up. Sir Harry, Jarvis, and Smithson joined them at this juncture. Racing along, the hounds appeared glued to the scent. Steeple-Jack, closely followed by Havoc, made light of every obstacle, defying anyone to pass him.

The pace began to increase. A riderless horse came galloping towards Octavia. She pulled Havoc back to avoid a collision, and just as Steeple-Jack was taking off at the fence in front of them a man crossed her. After dimly hearing an echo of Robin's voice, Octavia knew no more.

When she recovered consciousness she found herself lying on a strange bed with white dimity curtains on each side of it; in a room furnished with hard chairs and a horse-hair sofa. Robin Compton was kneeling at her feet.



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"Where am I?" she asked, sitting up.

"You're all right, darling; you've had a fall, and we carried you into the inn. Lie down; the doctor will be here in a moment," said Robin, getting up and sitting on the bed.

"I don't want a doctor; I'm perfectly well. What time is it? Why do you look so frightened? I promise you I'm not hurt. What exactly happened?" said Octavia, putting her hand up to her head.

"Have you got a headache? Do lie down just till the doctor comes. Are your feet cold?" he asked.

"Not in the least: feel them," she said, and throwing back the blanket she put one of her naked feet outside the eiderdown. Robin took it on his knee, and rubbed it gently with both his hands.

"If you please, sir, Dr. Marriott is here," said a servant girl, opening the door.

Octavia pulled the blanket over her.

"I'm afraid, doctor, you will find me a fraud. Mr. Compton thinks I'm dying, but I'm perfectly well."

"Miss Daventry had a fall on her head and we carried her here on a hurdle. I don't think there's much wrong; I'll leave you to examine her," said Robin.

Octavia watched him go out of the room, and lay back on the pillow.

After a careful examination the doctor said:

"Your pulse and temperature are normal, Miss Daventry. Do you feel giddy?"

"Not in the least: I suppose I've had concussion, have I? When can I hunt again?" asked Octavia.

"I should advise you to go to bed when you get home. It would be unwise for you to ride for a week or ten days. I'll come and see you to-morrow. You are at St. Mildred's, I understand. I think the concussion is mild, since you're not cold. Does your head ache at all?"

"Not a bit; I believe I fainted."

"I'll open the window, the room feels close; you had better motor back and go to bed. I don't want you to eat anything till I see you."

Dr. Marriott shook hands with Octavia, and after opening the window he left the room. He found Robin sitting on the stairs.

"There's nothing much the matter with Miss Daventry," he said. "Her pulse and temperature are normal, and she has no headache. She must stay in bed till I see her. She'll probably feel worse later on than she does now. You can't always tell the effects of even the mildest concussion. I'll call in the morning."

Visibly relieved, Robin Compton shook hands with the doctor, and accompanying him to the door of the inn watched him drive off.

When he returned, he found Octavia sitting up. Her flannel shirt was open at the throat and the colour had come back to her lips. He sat down by the side of the bed, and taking one of her hands in his, he held it to his lips.

"Thank God!—he says you're all right. That blasted Havoc took off too soon: though I must say, in justice to him, it was a very nasty place. D'you remember anything about your fall?"

"I remember you shouting something or other, and taking my foot out of the stirrup. Tell me, was it my fault?"

"Not at all, my darling. I'll tell you all about it later. It was Havoc's infernal vanity, and the indecision of the fellow who crossed you. I was a fool to let you ride the horse! Never mind; we'll exchange him for another Kilmallock, or give him a towelling in the hills."

"The doctor says I'm not to ride for ten days. Isn't it cruel, Robin! Just when you're here."

"But I'm going to hunt all the season, my pretty heart, so don't worry about that."

"But *I'm* not. I don't believe papa likes Cannes one bit!"



## “THE ROSE REVIVED”

“Why; have you heard from him?”

“Mama writes that the food’s bad, the sea blue, and that he’s having a rest; but papa’s like me—he hates resting.”

“Oh! that’ll be all right. The only thing that matters now is that you should get well. How do you feel? Give me your little feet: I’ll keep them warm,” he said, getting up and sitting on the bed.

“No, no; they’re not cold,” said Octavia, shrinking from the expression of his eyes. “I want to get up. It’s easier to talk sitting up.”

Robin got off the bed.

“You’ll just stay where you are,” he said; “we must obey the doctor. It’s quite early. Tell me, Octavia, who is Mr. Darcy?—the fellow you wrote you were in love with. Did you invent him to tease me?”

“No, I didn’t invent him, I wish I had; but I’m not going to introduce you to him.”

“Why?”

“Because you might be jealous.”

“Would you mind that? Most women like exciting men’s jealousy,” said Robin. “They think it proves that the man loves her.”

“I should have thought it meant he loved himself,” said Octavia; and remembering that Dick Filmer had given as a reason for his dislike of Robin that he only cared for himself, she added: “I could never love a man who cared for himself.”

“I shouldn’t be too sure of that. People who aren’t interested in themselves are as dull as ditch water.”

“Not duller than the self-centred.”

“Oh yes, they are: you needn’t be self-absorbed to care for yourself. One can be interested in heaps of things without making a hobby of them. You don’t mean to tell me, Octavia, that you don’t care about yourself?”

“Some days I love, and some days I hate myself.”

## OCTAVIA

“And the days you hate yourself are the days on which you need the most love, aren’t they?”

“I always need love—not a day passes that I don’t feel a hunger to be loved. I told you before, that I was born hungry.”

“I don’t remember your saying that,” said Robin, sitting down again on her bed. “You said you liked being loved in the abstract when you were with a man, and in the concrete when you were away from him.”

Robin drew nearer when he said this, and she lowered her eyes.

“And you said my injunctions should be obeyed,” she said, turning her head away.

“I can hardly believe I said anything as foolish as that,” he said, putting his hand under her chin and looking into her eyes. “You must let me take ever such care of you now, Octavia, because we’re alone and there’s no one else to look after you.”

“Did no one see me fall? I suppose they’re having the run of the season, and it’ll freeze the moment I’m up again!—It’s very hard on you too, to miss such a wonderful day!—I can’t help feeling that somehow or other it was my fault, I was going too fast.”

He dropped his hand.

“I don’t think so at all,” he said. “If you’d been going slower you wouldn’t have fallen clear. He’s a rum horse, and I believe if you had caught hold it would have been fatal. I only just got over by the skin of my teeth. It was worth the risk because we had the start of our lives. If hounds run for forty minutes to-day, I don’t believe there’ll be a soul with them; except possibly Sir Harry or Jarvis. Tell me, Octavia,” he said after a pause, “is there anything you like about me except my riding?”

“Yes, Robin, lots of things,” said Octavia, moved by an unexpected note of humility in his voice.

“What, for instance?” Questioning within himself



## “THE ROSE REVIVED”

whether he was not foolish in trying to probe what was at the back of her mind, and awaiting her answer with apprehension, he continued: “I’m not exactly humble, but . . .”

Octavia interrupted him. Putting her finger on her lips she said:

“You mustn’t tell me secrets, dearest!”

“Why?—Do you think I’m self-assured? Do you mean to tell me when I’m with you I am ever over-confident?”

“Perhaps not exactly that: but I think what gives you your distinction is your impenitent insolence. Now tell me, what is it you like about me? Don’t say my eyes, my hair or my brains . . . or anything flattering and stupid, but just say what you *really* think.”

“Well, if impenitent insolence is my distinction, unapproachable innocence is yours . . .”

Before Robin could finish his sentence the innkeeper’s wife opened the door:

“There’s a man wants to speak to you, sir.”

Robin got hastily off the bed and went to the door.

“Hullo, Merlin! How are the horses? Who caught Havoc? Miss Octavia had a bit of a shock; but the Doctor says she’s all right.”

“Come in, Merlin,” said Octavia.

Merlin took off his hat and stood in the doorway.

“Glad to hear you’re feeling pretty well, miss; from what they tells me it wasn’t the ’orse’s fault.”

“How was he caught, Merlin?”

“He caught ’isself. Mr. Jarvis’s second ’orseman tells me as ’ow ’e saw ’im gallop along and jump several fences—’e following-like—till ’e got stuck in a hobstacle.”

“Is he scratched?” asked Robin.

“We picked a few thorns out of ’im, but not deep; ’e’s fit to go out again to-morrow; if you like to come and look over ’im, ’e’s in the yard. The Colonel’s motor’s outside; I telephoned for it when they told me you was here.”

"How clever of you, Merlin!" said Octavia. "Then we'd better go, hadn't we, Robin?"

"We must get a blanket warmed first. I'll just go round and have a look at the horses. Lie still, and don't move till I come back."

Robin, accompanied by Merlin, walked across to the livery stables. After examining Havoc, whose scratches were negligible, he said:

"Where the devil is my second horse?"

"'Ounds were running 'ard when I left; I expect 'e's with the others."

"I'm not very keen to leave Steeple-Jack here for the night—he hates strange stables, and I can't let Miss Octavia go back alone."

"I'll come back here on Tattersalls and lead him to the 'Beer and Skittles,' if you like, sir."

"He's not much of a horse to lead: you'd better ride him and lead Tattersalls," said Robin, putting a sovereign into Merlin's hand.

He found Octavia sitting up, talking to the landlady.

"Yes, miss, this is a very old inn. It has belonged to the Noakes's for over a hundred years; Trudway only came into it by marrying me. I'm the last of the family, and was called Nancy Noakes before I became Mrs. Trudway. It was famous for its home-brewed ale at one time. That's why there's the signboard of a rose stuck in a tumbler of beer and it's called 'The Rose Revived.' Now put on your stockings, miss, while they're warm. I'm afraid you won't be able to keep my slippers on, but if you're in a blanket you won't need them? You look a bit white; have a drop of brandy."

"No, no!" said Robin, "you must never touch brandy when you fall on your head. Just get the blanket will you, Mrs. Trudway, and we'll wrap her up in it."

When the door closed on the landlady, Octavia said:

"Do I look ill, Robin?"



## “THE ROSE REVIVED”

“You look lovely, my sweet dear,” he answered.

“I didn’t say *pretty*—I said *ill*. You’re as irrelevant as the White King in ‘Alice in Wonderland’ who said, ‘There’s nothing like hay when you’re feeling faint,’ and Alice said, ‘Sal volatile is better.’ The White King said, ‘I didn’t say there was nothing *better*; I said there was nothing like it.’”

Robin listened. Octavia continued: “How far is it to St. Mildred’s?”

“About fifteen miles: do you wish it was longer, or shorter?”

“I shan’t tell you.”

When the landlady was paid, and Octavia’s riding things were made into a parcel, Robin wrapped her up in the blanket and carried her into the motor.

As they drove away Mrs. Trudway turned to her husband, who had been busying himself in the stable yard.

“What a nice-spoken gentleman! That’s a match if ever I saw one!” she said.

“Is he sweet on her?”

“Well, Trudway, he’d be pretty backward if he wasn’t,” she retorted.

Octavia, propped with pillows and covered in her blanket, lay on one seat, and Robin sat opposite her with his back to the chauffeur. She wondered whether it would be best to shut her eyes as she felt a slight languor creeping over her. Fearing the conversation would not remain impersonal, she said:

“Light a cigarette, Robin.”

“No, thank you,” he said, letting down the window and putting his hand near her head to feel if there was a draught.

They relapsed into silence.

The daylight was flickering out as the motor swung past the dripping hedges on the wet high road. Seeing her eyes close Robin sat erect, and watched her like a detective. He noted the deep shadows cast by her eyelashes, and wondered if the Doctor had been right. How long would it be before

she hunted ? What was he to do about the Havoc horse ? . . . Had Jarvis anything to mount her on ? Should he let Cuthbert buy the horse for Vince ? Of course Vince would have to try it first, as there would be the devil to pay if Tragedy or any other favourite hound was kicked.

A sudden jerk made Octavia open her eyes and ask how far they were from St. Mildred's.

"Only ten minutes more. Did you feel that jolt ?"

Octavia shook her head, and throwing back the blanket put her hand out and took Robin's.

"You've been very sweet to me," she said. "Tell me, Robin, do you like me best when you are with me or when you are away from me ?"

"What a ridiculous question ! I love you always." Kneeling down he put his arms round her and placing her head against his shoulder he pressed his profile to her cheek. "But I love you best when you are close to me : like you are now," he said.

"I was afraid you would say that," she answered a little sadly.

"Tell me, my pretty sweet, do you care for me a little ? Don't move : I'm not going to say anything that you'll mind ; but do you want things to go on just as they are ? Surely you don't like stopping in the middle of a run, do you ?"

"Sometimes," she said, pressing her face closer to his.

The lights of the house blazed into the motor. The chauffeur pulled up at the front door of St. Mildred's.



## CHAPTER XIII

### *CONVALESCENCE*

**H**ORSES up to twice her weight were more exhausting for Octavia to ride than Robin realized, and although her fall had not hurt her, it had given her a shock : she did not feel as well on the days that followed as she had done immediately after her accident. Robin's tenderness and care, added to his promptness and efficiency, had made more impression on Octavia than she knew. Though he had ridden over to St. Mildred's as often as was compatible with his hunting, she felt neglected when he left her.

When you are not well you can never be sure who will suit your humour ; and as Greville avoided going to see her, and Jessica hated every form of indisposition, Octavia was dull, bored, and full of self-pity.

The hunting world, she reflected, was all right when you were fit and well, but strangely indifferent to those who fell out of its ranks. They made poor bedside companions. Accounts of runs you were not in were impossible to listen to, and horses and hounds could never be topics to inspire conversation. Riding all day made you too stupid to talk well about anything. Too restless to read and too tired to write, all you could hope for was to be able to sleep ; and though sleep might allay your temper, it could never improve your wits.

She tried to console herself by saying it was not only hunting people who were too absorbed in the lives they were living to be interested in other people. Her father was over-absorbed in finance ; her mother in her garden ;

Greville in his theories ; Waterborough in his reforms ; and in any case no one cared much about anyone when they were on the shelf. When Greville Pelham talked about having a life of his own it had sounded wonderful and convincing, but it was a solution that was forced upon us whether we liked it or not. The Professor had saddened her by saying we had been given incommunicable lives ; but for the first time she realized there was truth in what he had said.

She had seen nothing of Greville though he had brought Waterborough to visit her ; but, as they had arrived and departed together, she had not exchanged a sentence alone with him. She was consoled for this by hearing from Jessica that he was prolonging his visit.

Ten days after her accident it had been arranged that Susan and Greville should take Octavia to hear Waterborough speak at an evening meeting in the vicinity. At Colonel Brabazon's suggestion she had mounted Robin that day, after which he was to return for his postponed visit to St. Mildred's. Having finished a long letter to the Professor, she was wondering how Robin had got on with Havoc, when he walked into the room.

Things had changed between them during the days that had passed since her accident. The Robin she had criticized was endeavouring to be a Robin she would approve ; and whereas formerly he had only cared for her companionship, he wanted above all things now to win her esteem. To all appearances the advancement in affection was upon her side, but in reality he was moving forward while she was standing still.

On his last visit she had pressed her face against his shoulder and expounded in a voice of defeat the many things she needed to enlarge her possibilities and complete her life. He had refrained from putting his arms round her, knowing that in these humours she was not addressing him so much as endeavouring to get rid of herself, and would have said much the same things if she had been alone. He was a mixture of chapel and cocktail, to absolve or to stimulate her, and when



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the process of confession was over she was gay and relieved, and appeared to have little further use for him. If he made a move to capture her, he would only interrupt her outpourings and estrange her heart. He knew that if he were bold enough to show the desire he had to possess the whole of her, she would take a step backwards, and he would lose for ever the little he had got.

Octavia was unconscious of what was happening. To her, Robin was immeasurably more companionable than he had ever been. She had given him several books, and though he had not marked the passages she thought striking, he had at any rate read and marked them. It gave her a sense of security to think that their friendship was not a mere flirtation; but something finer and rarer, and of a kind that would be of permanent delight to them.

When Robin came into the room she pulled him down on the sofa beside her.

"How like you to come just when I most wanted you!—I've got a thousand things I long to tell you."

Robin sat erect, as if he had been a chair against which she was leaning.

"I've been thinking how difficult it would be to live entirely in a hunting world; how lonely one would feel! My accident has been nothing; but if I'd been really ill, or broken an arm or a leg, who is there down here I could have talked to about interesting things? Lots of people have been to see me, but they're embarrassed when they come. Hunting people don't like illness. They feel like you or I do when we've got to catch a loose horse; it throws them out of the run. Some occupations seem to take all the humanity out of people!—it's a depressing thought."

Robin listened, but did not hear. Her sensations made her eloquent; his made him dumb. Like a duet on instruments tuned to different keys, the chords jarred. Engrossed in her own reflections, Octavia did not notice this, but after a little time she put her cheek against his shoulder.

"You're not loving me to-day, Robin!" she said. "You aren't listening to what I'm saying; and yet I may be going away soon; right away out of hearing, among the hills; watching the cold birds in the leafless trees."

Octavia had no intention of going away, but she was making a picture to illustrate her thoughts, and describing the dissatisfaction she was feeling with herself and with life.

"D'you mean to say you aren't coming back? You know, I suppose, that I've come here to stay? Am I to sell your horses?"

"No; you're to ride them. But mama and papa may have missed me. Anyway, I've only got Kilmallock to ride. How did you get on with Havoc? Did you lose your temper with him?"

"Why d'you ask?"

"I've seen you lose your temper. Personally, when you're like that I prefer leaving you to cool down."

"I don't like cool people," said Robin. "I find them devastating."

"And yet you like me!" said Octavia.

"You're not cool. You're ice-cold: I prefer that. Frost-bitten people cure themselves with ice. When I'm chilled you restore my circulation. Tell me, are you going to the meeting to-night?"

"Yes; aren't you? Perhaps you prefer to stay with Jessica. She says Colonel Brabazon won't let her go; but I've no doubt if you weren't here that wouldn't be a barrier!"

Robin did not answer. Feeling she had been a little brittle, she continued:

"I long to hear Waterborough! We had a wonderful talk the other day."

"So you told me," said Robin.

"Why don't you ask me what he said? You're not a bit communicative, or nice! The fact is, you aren't interested in anything but what you feel!"



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"That's much truer of you. No one is so indifferent to what I or anyone else feels as you are."

"Oh ; of course, if you don't want to hear what I've got to say when I'm sad and puzzled . . ." she said petulantly.

"But, my sweet darling," he said, interrupting her with impatience, "how am I to know when you are sad and puzzled ? You tell me nothing, and don't talk to me. You talk AT me."

She got up and walked to the window.

It was not often that they were alone, and Robin felt every moment was being wasted in foolish bickerings—talk that was neither happy nor angry, clever or stupid, and which he had brought upon himself. A few weeks ago, if she had put her face against his shoulder he would have been unspeakably happy. What was the screen that was coming between them ? When she offered him something of herself, why did he behave as if he did not exist ? What had become of him ? Where was the Robin of the beech walk that could make her change colour and give him her lips ? He reflected with bitterness that she had never really given him anything ; he had merely been a means to an end. She was a regular woman. She had wanted something, and he was the only person who had the power to give it to her—that was the meaning of most of the jewels and some of the kisses of half the women he had known.

As he was thinking how he could break the silence, Hawkins came into the room.

"Mrs. Malet has sent this note, miss ; the chauffeur's waiting for an answer."

Octavia opened the letter and read :

*Will you come round in the motor and see me for a few minutes ? You will be back to tea.*

*Yours affectionately,  
Susan.*

*P.S. Don't forget it is your turn to pay me a visit.*

"I'm sorry I've been cross, Robin! Say you forgive me. I'll be back in half an hour. Susan's an angel and I've behaved badly to her. There! Kiss my hands, dearest, and say you don't hate me."

Putting her hands up to his lips, she ran out of the room.

Octavia had taken a fancy to Susan Malet from the day of her arrival. The interest was reciprocated, and Susan was glad to have won the confidence of so much youth and intelligence. She had known Robin and his family from her childhood, and since living in Harbington had renewed her friendship with him. She was a widow, and devoted to an only sister who had died, leaving three small children. Having no family of her own, Susan dedicated her life to them, and when her brother-in-law was away, they stayed for months at a time in her house. Having suffered, there was nothing she did not understand, and she left an impression of tenderness and wisdom upon everyone she met. Young and old confided in her, and there was not a moment in her life when she was too occupied to give everything she had of time, counsel and affection to other people.

Octavia's youth and inexperience, as well as her keenness and beauty, appealed to her, and she watched with a disinterested affection the development that was taking place between the man she had known since childhood and the young woman who was almost a stranger to her. In all this she was not so much anxious about Robin, as she did not think it would hurt him for once to feel the effects of his inconsequent love affairs—but her heart went out to Octavia. She guessed without reasoning that there was a struggle going on in her nature; a baffling conflict between what was emotional and physical and what was intellectual and spiritual; and she knew that Jessica would be powerless to guide her.

When Octavia came into the room she put her hands on her shoulders, and, kissing her, said;

"I hope you won't think me impertinent, but I would like to have a little talk with you. Sit down."



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"Dearest Susan, I would rather talk to you than to anyone. I'm dead out of spirits!"

"Darling child, I only want to say one word to you. You have done a great deal for Robin Compton. You have changed him from a cool and collected friend into a restless and irritable acquaintance. His temper has been modified by your good humour. He struggles to read books; to understand politics; to praise what he has laughed at and ignored, and to please you in a hundred other ways. You have given him a goal to work for, and to hope for. You are trying to prepare him for marriage by estranging him from himself. And what can this do for you? When you are out of spirits you go to him, and when you are happy you detach yourself from him. His love is your drug, and your love is his life."

Octavia listened, mute and miserable.

"Then you think I oughtn't to see him any more?" she said.

"I don't say that; only I don't want you to marry him. You are under the impression that your influence will be permanent, but, alas! one can only influence the strong, never the weak characters of life."

"But Robin doesn't want to marry me. He's never even proposed; and I don't want to marry anyone!"

"That's all right, darling. I'm devoted to Robin, but don't imagine you can change him."

"You mean don't marry him out of pity. You think I've done him harm?"

"No, I don't. I think, in a sort of way, you've done him good; but don't deceive yourself and imagine you'll remain scatheless because you know where you are, and he doesn't. You may be a little caught by his advances, and find the situation less easy of retreat than you think. Now kiss me!—that's all I've got to say."

Upon her return Octavia found the room hot and full. Greville asked after her health, and Jessica was pouring out

tea. Robin stood moodily watching, wondering what Susan had talked about.

"I'm perfectly well. I've often turned head over heels before and no one has taken any notice of it," she said to Greville.

"Are you going to the meeting to-night? I warned Waterborough you might be coming."

"I'm glad you warned him!"

"I mean I told him," said Greville, surprised by the tone of her voice. "Don't you want to go?"

"I don't think I do. It'll be so hot! I want to feel fit so as to hunt to-morrow."

"You're right not to tire yourself. You'll have lots of opportunities of hearing Waterborough."

"No, I shan't—I'm going away soon."

"I thought you were hunting here till Christmas."

"My people will want me before then, I expect. Are you going away?"

"I've settled nothing; it depends on my mother. But I shall be down here off and on for the next few weeks."

"I doubt if I shall," said Octavia.

"What is that I hear you saying, darling? You don't mean to say you want to leave us? We won't allow that, will we, Robin?" said Jessica.

"I've been here a long time, you know, and I didn't mean to imply I was going away immediately."

"You're hunting with the Harbington to-morrow, Miss Octavia, aren't you?" said Colonel Brabazon. "Jarvis, the Master, and Smithson, were all asking after you. Smithson wants you to ride that black horse of his called Zulu one day, and you can't have a better mount."

"Smithson is coming on!" said Robin with acerbity.

"I should love that," said Octavia, without more enthusiasm than was needed to vex Robin. "But if you don't mind, I won't go to the meeting to-night. I'd rather dine in bed." Turning to Greville, she continued: "If you



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see Mr. Waterborough tell him I'm sorry, but shall hope to continue my talk with him another day."

"Of course, darling, you mustn't tire yourself. I ought to have taken more care of you. Shall some of us come and sit with you after dinner?" said Jessica.

"You're very kind, but I shall shut up early."

"I'll give Waterborough your message," said Greville, opening the door for her.

When Octavia's tray was removed and she was left for the night, she felt profoundly unhappy. Susan Malet's words were engraved upon her brain.

She did not ask for knowledge; she did not value success; and she hated security. Her only demand upon life was to feel—not, of course, the kind of impulse that made her throw her arms round Robin, but to have her heart intensified, and her emotions satisfied. In books she had read of men of temperament, intellect, and character who would have made her supremely happy. Why could she not meet them in real life? Was she to give all that she had in herself to a man to make him rich enough to return them to her? Was she to do all the work—to give, to feel, and to suggest? Except for herself, what did Robin Compton feel? and except for his hobbies and antagonisms Greville's impulses were so restrained that it was impossible to know what he felt. . . . What she wanted was that the man should give, and she should *feel*. She had always thought examiners stupid to plough boys for missing facts, or being weak in dates and Divinity. What you wanted in youth was not what *you* put into it, but what it could suggest of its *own* to interpret your teaching. If you reached enough shelves to read enough books you could learn every fact. But you must have a key in your own mind if the teaching you received was to be of any value. What she was looking for was the key.

As she could only marry one man, she was going to love different things in different men first; or to make a success of marriage she would have to prune away too many shoots,

and in the process behead the buds of what might bloom into flowers. Why should she prune herself into a hedge? —a hedge not to guard her from her enemies, but from herself.

Robin would be a fool to propose to her. To declare himself was another matter. But if he were to propose, he would knock down a perfect structure which suited them both, and put in its place—what? An uncomfortable indecision. He wanted her love. He did not want marriage so much as to prevent her from marrying anyone else. She needed his love, and was as well aware as he was that marriage between them would be irrelevant, and a sudden “Yes” on her side a surprise. It would not only be the first step that costs, but the first move away from their love. She must at all hazards prevent this, and exorcise the banshee that was breaking in like a third person upon their daring intimacy.

It was all terribly difficult. Was she to hold the torch herself that she was to follow? She saw no beacon ahead to keep her off the rocks. Of what use was all her enterprise, all her adventure, when she hungered for what was outside herself? She had better go back to her moors and her parents; for on the one hand she had simple and punctual duties, and on the other large and healing vistas.

She opened the window wide and appealed to the silent sequestered night; but the crescent moon turned a cold face away from her.

. . . . .  
When dinner was over Sir Harry went to talk to his groom, and Jessica and Robin were alone. After trying several conversational openings, Jessica realized that nothing she could say was going to engage Robin’s attention, and she wished that she had gone to the meeting.

The clutch of custom had robbed their intimacy of much of its edge, but though she was ready to encourage Robin with Octavia as long as it had a chilling effect upon Greville



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Pelham, it was humiliating to think she had lost the power to entertain any man who had once loved her.

"I wonder why Octavia changed her mind?" she said, feeling that if she could not amuse, she might at any rate provoke Robin. "She had been so keen to hear Waterborough. I don't think she looked particularly tired to-night, did you?"

"I can't say I did."

"*Quelle mouche l'a piqué?* I expect by now she is regretting it. Shall I go and ask her if she'd like to see you?"

"On no account. It's not very surprising after a fall on your head that you shouldn't want to be with a lot of dull people in a hot room."

"Susan and Greville dull! They wouldn't like that at all."

"I wasn't thinking particularly of them. By the by, how long is Pelham staying? I thought he was to go when I came."

"What made you think so?"

"Wasn't he the overflow that made your house too full to have me?"

"It's so long ago I hardly remember; but I really don't know his plans. He's in nobody's way here, and he talks well."

"D'you think so? I find talking to him like lifting a heavy dumb-bell."

"I expect he thinks us light," said Jessica.

"I don't suppose he thinks much about anyone but himself."

"In that he's not peculiar. When we aren't eating, or sleeping, most of us are thinking of ourselves." Turning to Sir Harry, who had rejoined them, she said: "What do you say? Robin says we think too much about ourselves."

"Dear me! you are very serious," said Sir Harry, walking to the writing-table.

"But haven't you observed how serious Robin is becoming? Everyone notices it. You were seen with a book

the other day. Perhaps it was what in literary catalogues is called 'a gift book,' but I'm told you not only read now, but have almost forgotten how to swear."

"Don't be a gowk, Jessica!" said Robin, with irritation.

"I'm not much of a linguist, but isn't that a Scotch word? I'll go and ask Octavia how she is, as I know how dull one can feel when, after dining in bed, you find you aren't a bit tired," said Jessica.

Robin, who had written a note to Octavia and found out from Jenkins that she was perfectly well, did not attempt to stop her. His only desire was to avoid further conversation; but he remained in the sitting-room in the hope that he might get an answer from Octavia, and in his state of irritation he knew that it would be impossible for him to sleep.

Mrs. Brabazon's surmise had been right. When Octavia had finished a letter to the Professor, she regretted her decision and wished she had gone to the meeting.

It is often more difficult to go to sleep when everything is arranged for your comfort than when you are sitting in church or on a chair; and though her youth made it easy for her to sleep almost at any time and in any position, Octavia felt incapable of closing an eye.

She seldom looked at what she wrote, but before gumming down the envelope she read her letter:

*Beloved Professor,*

*You will be frightened by the length of this letter, but it's to make up for my silence. I had a fall on my head a fortnight ago, but am perfectly well now. While I was lying on the sofa Greville Pelham brought his friend Waterborough, the Labour candidate, to see me. I wrote down his conversation.*

*He told me he had started life as a builder, but his speaking had brought him into notice, and now the Trade Unions help him. I told him I should hate to do less work than I could, and would rather die than obey their demoralizing orders.*



## CONVALESCENCE

*Waterborough* : " You all say that because there are two things the majority of you don't understand. I don't mean you, but your class. The two things are, first, hunger, and then indifference—not only indifference, but the hostility that many people feel for working men. You say you don't think it honourable to go 'cushie' or, as you in Scotland say, 'ca canny,' but how would you feel if, after waiting and waiting, and no job ever coming, you're taken on to build a house. As the house grows and grows, and gets finally up, you see batches of thirty men sent off daily, till there are about twenty left. Many a time I've said, 'Don't go galloping on. Go slow. It's the last money we'll see, and most of us got ill when we had our last bout of starvation.'

" You don't know what hunger is. It makes wild beasts of men. I've sometimes not had the strength to steal a hen, though I have often stolen food, and I've no wife or family or anything now. My father died when I was three and my mother left me a few years ago. I banish her from my mind ; I can't work when she's there : yet she's never far away. Her hunger and sufferings hang about me. Ah ! it's that that none of you know about—Hunger. Then it's dull to work from eight in the morning, with a pick, a shovel, or a trowel, till six at night, at 15s. or at best 19s. 6d., which is all I ever got—a week behind paying the small shops for bad meat.

" I've known myself run away into the dark for a holiday, as you might take your Riviera. I went on the tramp, sleeping under haystacks, and breaking stones for coppers in the daytime. That was my holiday ; and I enjoyed it. It was fine lying under the stars, the burden of debt, and doubt, and the winding up of the last job, all away from me, only the occasional excitement of catching a hen without too much clucking !

" You ask if a door would not have been opened to me and food or help given ? Why should I have risked humiliation ? You needn't ask for help when you can take it ! Now I come to the second thing. The first is Hunger, the second Indifference. You can't measure the colossal Indifference of mankind."

*He said all this in the gentlest of voices, without emphasis or excitement ; but it made me terribly unhappy. (I felt it would be irrelevant to talk of the glory denied to the rich of hard manual work.) He went on to say there was no cure for indifference but strikes ; and the world had recognized this and given the workmen their only power, which was to strike. Though they knew by this the poorest of their comrades would suffer untold misery, it was a misery they were all prepared to face. How, otherwise, were you to kill indifference ?*

*I said the Liberal Party had complete confidence in the political common sense of the average man ; but both the Labour and the Tory Party were governed by fear. They were out not to persuade, but to force. Labour was trying to undermine the influence of men who by their ability had risen above their fellows. They were stealing the earnings of men who had probably been as poor as himself. They had no ideal except the ideal of knocking others down to get on the top. The difference between trampling on the rich and trampling on the poor was not so very great morally, and materially it was foolish. They believed in strikes as against conferences ; competition as against co-operation ; and sheltering trade behind the corrupting influence of Protection. Our party believed that liberty should not be fought for : we had a right to claim it ; for if we saw one Government unjust to the poor and another to the rich, we would fight to overthrow them both. I assure you I was quite eloquent ! I asked him if he knew the text :*

*“The vile person shall be no more called liberal . . . the liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand.” He had never heard it and said it would make a good sermon. After that they left me.*

*I never enjoyed anything so much. First-rate conversation excites me as much as hunting, and leaves more behind it. Do you remember Legouv  , writing of Malibran, says : “Sa conversation avait des lendemains d  licieux ?” You must meet Waterborough ; but I don’t think he’ll get in. The people down here say the sort of things you always hear :*



## CONVALESCENCE

*"This is what educating the masses has done." . . . "They must be taught who their masters are!" . . . "What I say is, 'Shoot 'em down!'" "We want a dictator," etc.*

*Love and blessings. I shall be with you before you've forgotten me.*

*Octavia.*

Jenkins came into the room with a letter in her hand. "Mr. Compton enquired after you, miss, and gave me this note."

"I hope you told him I was all right, or they'll fuss me about hunting to-morrow," said Octavia. "Did you tell Merlin I'd ride Kilmallock?—and post my letter to Lord Tilbury?"

"Yes, miss. And I was to say to you from Sir Harry that he would drive you to the meet to-morrow."

"Did you tell him that would suit me perfectly?"

"I told Mr. Robson."

"Who?"

"Sir Harry's valet, miss."

When her maid had gone Octavia opened Robin's letter :

*My sweet, sweet Darling,*

*I can't bear to think that I was so wooden this afternoon when you were puzzled and sad; but it was difficult for me to know, as you looked ever so well and happy when I came into the room; and of the two—I should have said I was the person puzzled.*

*To tell you the truth, I was dead out of form, having had the devil of a day on Havoc. I lied to you; for, though I made him do what I meant him to in the end, I lost my temper, and think him without exception the most irritating animal I ever saw. No one could have ridden him as well as you have. He jumps like a stag, and is quick on his toes, but he's always looking about for something to shy at, and so impressionable that he starts at a fusee. We must sell him; though who to, God*

*knows ! The Harbington meet near here to-morrow, so we'll ride on to covert together. Scribble one line and tell me you're not sad, or puzzled, or tired, and that I'm still your*  
*Robin.*

Octavia put the letter under her pillow, and taking a piece of notepaper wrote :

*I'm not tired, or sad, or puzzled, but always, all ways, the Octavia you know.*

When she had closed the envelope she heard a tap on the door. Jessica came into the room.

"Your light was on, so I knew you weren't asleep. Why, darling, your room is a flower-garden ! I never saw such roses."

"Aren't they wonderful ? Lord Tilbury has sent them every day. I really think it's sweet of him, as he's quite poor, isn't he ?"

"Yes, he is ; but I've come to the conclusion that the rich and the poor live in exactly the same way. Tilbury ought to have had a large fortune. He's romantically generous. Tell me, you weren't serious when you said you were going to leave us, were you ?"

"Dearest Mrs. Brabazon, I'm seldom serious," said Octavia, "and unless I'm killed out hunting you won't lose me yet."

"Shall I tell Robin that ?"

"You can tell them all ; though I expect the news is of more interest to me than to anyone else."

"I said Robin, because I think he's upset about you. You mustn't be unkind to him, darling. He's really fond of you."

"Oh, I love Robin !—but he's well able to look after himself," said Octavia lightly. "I don't think he's very heavy metal, do you ?"

"Do you like heavy metal ?" said Jessica.



## CONVALESCENCE

Octavia felt that they were both thinking of the same thing.

"I think heavy metal is all very well, but would be terrible to live with," said Jessica. "It so seldom goes with a sense of humour, or colour, or temperament, or any of the things that make life gay and joyous. After a time I'm sure it would wear one down."

"I wonder?" said Octavia.

Before leaving the room Jessica asked Octavia if she had any message she could deliver to Robin.

"You might give him this note, and mind you say I'm quite all right and fit to hunt."

"I certainly will; now you must go to sleep."

Jessica turned out the lights and shut the door.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *THE LABOUR CANDIDATE*

**A**LTHOUGH Octavia had recovered from the physical effects of her fall, she dreaded that she might have damaged her nerve, and the bare possibility filled her with apprehension. To be afraid of being afraid is a poignant sensation, and one that sooner or later is always experienced by fox-hunters.

She was full of trepidation as she and Sir Harry drove to the meet.

“It’s ever so good of you to take me, dearest Sir Harry ; I could easily have ridden. Robin was rather disappointed, I think. You see, he looks upon me as his pupil.”

“Well, I look upon you as my patient, and the first day you hunt after concussion you shouldn’t tire yourself. Permit me to add, I hope you will learn to disappoint Robin ; it will not be bad for either of you. If we don’t learn to disappoint our admirers, my dear child, we end by deceiving them.”

Sir Harry felt bold in saying this, but he had formed a high opinion of Octavia ; not only for her beauty and courage, but for her gaiety of nature. He had observed that during the time she was laid up Robin’s attentions had increased, and he had come to the conclusion that Octavia had no one of wisdom to advise her. He knew all about Robin Compton, and it was clear to him that Jessica, for reasons of her own, was not averse to encouraging his courtship.



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Remembering what Susan Malet had said, Octavia asked Sir Harry if he liked Robin.

"I like him very much ; but we like lots of things that aren't particularly good for us," he answered.

"I always think the things I like are ever so good for me ! When I was a little girl, my nurse thought everything I hated was better for me than what I liked, and I was forced to swallow all sorts of slops which made me ill. You think one can like too much, do you ? I think people don't like half *enough* in life. I adore keenness !"

"So do I ; but some things are better worth being keen about than others. If you had a pack of foxhounds, you wouldn't want them to pursue the wrong scent however keen they were ; as this would not only upset the huntsman, but deceive the hounds, and disappoint the field."

"Then you think I'm running hares, and disappointing and deceiving everyone ?" she said.

"Not disappointing *everyone*, but possibly one or two ; and what is of greater importance, you may be deceiving yourself."

"Indeed, indeed I'm *not* ! I will make you a promise, dearest Sir Harry ; whatever may happen to me in life, I'll never, *never* deceive anybody."

Octavia spoke with intensity. Her words gave her the sort of satisfaction people feel after performing an act of heroism.

When they were on their horses Sir Guy rode up.

"Better stick to me to-day, then you won't get into mischief. You don't fancy that, Miss Octavia—eh ?"

"I've often heard you curse people who talk out hunting, Master, and I'm sure you wouldn't speak a word to me," said Octavia.

"Don't know so much about that," he replied. "We all curse sometimes—even Cuthbert swears at that blethering Count."

"Do you mean the man who crossed me when I had my fall? He's not a Count."

"All foreigners are Counts," replied the Master.

At this moment Lord Tilbury joined them, and Octavia thanked him for his roses.

"Oh, that's nothing! Are you all of a dither? Well, don't worry. If you take another toss to-day your nerve will come in with a click. It's the only thing, believe me."

"What you say is true," said Jarvis. "Not that I think Miss Daventry's nerve will have suffered; but if it has, a fall which doesn't hurt you is the best thing possible. I have got a horse out to-day I would like you to try, miss; if you fancy him, Mr. Compton thinks he might suit you better than the flea-bitten."

"Is he the horse indicated to give me the right kind of fall?" asked Octavia.

"I don't think the fence is made that he could fall over. I think I could find a purchaser for Havoc," said Jarvis.

"Hadn't you better have a day on him first, Mr. Jarvis?" Octavia suggested. "I think that would be the only fair thing to do."

"Very well. You have half a day on mine and I'll have the same. What do you say to that?"

"I must ride Havoc once more before settling if I'll part with him," she said.

"By God, no! That you shan't do," said Robin, who had arrived in time to hear Octavia's remark.

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed. "I shall certainly ride him again. Havoc's not a man's horse."

At this Robin, who had been put out by several morning misadventures, rode away.

"Compton seems to think he's won the fight for the ashes this time, Miss Octavia," said Tilbury. "But I can assure you he and Havoc were at cross-purposes from the find to the finish, when you mounted him. His memory is either defec-



tive or he's off his feed. Do look at that chap the Master calls the Count with the cottage piano on his back—that's his lunch."

"If they draw this spinney blank we're going to Craddlebury wood; if you take my advice you'll keep outside, as the rides are up to your hocks," said Sir Harry to Octavia. "I don't often advise this, as there's always a chance you'll be left if you don't go with hounds into a wood, but you won't miss much, as the country round Craddlebury's blind and sticky. We shall be in the vale this afternoon."

It was clear there was little or no scent; the hounds drew without enterprise, and after hanging about for some time Haycock drew them off. The field proceeded at a leisurely pace towards an upland country. Octavia waited while Tilbury got off to tighten the girths of his saddle.

There is nothing so easy as to avoid a person you do not want to speak to when you are out hunting, and, had it not been for his loss of temper, Octavia would hardly have noticed that Robin did not come near her. She resented his air of proprietorship; Robin was getting intolerable. He was grumpy to Jessica, taciturn with Greville, offhand with Tilbury, and had lost all his gaiety and good manners. It was a pleasure to look at the handsome, youthful face of her companion after Robin's sulks and frowns.

"Would Mr. Smithson's Zulu suit me, Lord Tilbury?" she asked.

"By Jove, I should rather say so! I've cadged for a mount on him ever since I've hunted at Dashington, but with indifferent success. If you like, I'll drive you next week to the meet of the Bragg, and you can ride Zulu and have tea with me."

"That would be great fun. To go well to hounds, Sir Harry says you ought to ride different horses. But could I ride Zulu?"

"Now what do you expect me to say? You know perfectly well there is no horse you couldn't ride. I believe

Robin's jealous of you : he's had it all his own way too long ; you've spoilt him."

"It's odd you should say exactly what I was thinking. I never realized that men were spoilable. Look here, there's no hurry, and we are some way off Craddlebury, aren't we ?"

"What is it you want ?"

"I vote we let them all pass, and then slip out of the road and jump a fence or two ; I want to see if I'm frightened."

"Well, if you are, I'd like to be there to see it. We'll turn out at that gate and see what sort of barriers are likely to stop us. Don't give me away to Robin, or he may disturb my beauty-sleep."

"How funny you all are about Robin's temper ! I've never seen him really angry."

"Come, you can hardly say he was rosy at the meet. You can take it from me when Robin's put out there's nothing half-hearted about him. Now, there ! There's a proper little place for us to lark over," said Tilbury, pointing to a quick-set fence with a clean-cut ditch on the take-off. "Shall we jump it side by side, or would you like Cunning Kate to go first ?"

"I think it might hurt Kilmallock's feelings if I were to follow you."

Most of the riders had passed when they turned out of the road.

Disappointed at having so little to do, their mounts rose like birds at the fence, and Octavia and her companion galloped along over the next three fields like happy children.

They arrived late at Craddlebury wood, and were informed that the hounds had hardly been more than a moment in covert before the fox had gone away in the direction of Harbington. This was upsetting news, as after the first fence Octavia had been reassured about her nerve and felt in high spirits. She looked round disconsolately



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and saw young women in gaiters and tam-o'-shanters, and a few stragglers and terriers trying to pursue the hunt.

"I say, how stupid we've been! Robin will have every right to be angry with me for larking! I suppose we shan't see the hounds again to-day. I *am* sorry! What are we to do?"

"I wonder where my cracknel biscuit is?"

"Do you mean your second horseman?"

"No, my lunch. I'll tell you what: we'll shog on towards the 'Anchor and Dolphin.' Our fellows are sure to be drinking, and we can pick up some information."

"It's odd how a field of over two hundred people can disappear; and yet they can't all have got a start. Has this ever happened to you before?" said Octavia.

"Bless your heart!—I've lain on the sky-line many a time and wished I had never been born. We'll find them all right. There's a chap with a terrier. Let's ask him."

They turned away from the wood and rode towards the spires of Harbington.

Lord Tilbury was contented to be alone with Octavia, and after assuring her that the day was early, he succeeded by his lively accounts of sporting incidents in entertaining her till they reached Harbington.

As they approached the "Anchor and Dolphin" they were delayed by a procession of boys following a brass band and carrying banners. Bits of coloured bunting were on the lamp-posts and flags hung from every window. When they reached the market square they saw a mass of men and women wearing purple and white rosettes, who were shoving and jostling to get nearer the inn. Looking up, Octavia recognized the Labour candidate, who was addressing them from the balcony.

"What luck!" she exclaimed. "We must stop and hear what he's saying. Look how the people love him!"

"Is that the chap who is going to redress our grievances?"

I must say he's a fine-looking fellow. I don't believe he's a Labour man at all."

"He's quite well-educated, you know. I wonder where all these strange-looking people come from."

"They're a pretty rough lot; I wouldn't care to meet them by candle-light."

"Come over here. We can hear every word without being in anybody's way," said Octavia, wending her way through the crowd.

Kilmallock pointed his toes and, walking gingerly on to the pavement, took up his stand behind a trolley.

"We don't want promises or programmes, and we don't believe in catch-words," the speaker was saying. "Phrases of no particular meaning won't help us. What we are up against, and have to fight, is Indifference—the indifference of men who won't work. The people who tell you these are to be found only among the rich are quacks. You mustn't listen to quacks. You will find as many men among the poor as among the rich who don't like work . . ."

Octavia could not hear the rest of the sentence as some of the women near her were talking. Boys selling rosettes began a scuffle and surged up against her. Kilmallock was accustomed to pressure from horses, and even an occasional hound coming too close to him, but that a lot of undecided human beings should be pushing him about put too great a strain upon his manners. He started backing and curvetting. Tilbury—never a good listener—was afraid Cunning Kate would start the same antics.

"Let's go," he said.

"Oh, no!—I wouldn't miss this for the world. He's not an ordinary political speaker; he's a marvellous man! Let's get off and hear the end." Observing a look of disappointment in his face, she said: "You go on! I'll catch you up in a few minutes."

"Just as you like," he replied, trying to keep near her. The meeting had been fixed for the luncheon hour, and



## THE LABOUR CANDIDATE

eager men and boys were streaming out of the factories.

"Get off quickly and go into the inn," said Tilbury. "A lot of these legislators are tight. I'll find someone to hold our horses and join you. Steady, Kate, steady!"

Kilmallock began to arch his back and upset the people, who were already angry at seeing Octavia on the pavement. After an uncomfortable bound on to the road a man put his hand upon her rein. Octavia saw Greville Pelham standing beside her.

"Get off," he said peremptorily. "Go into the inn; and don't leave Waterborough till I come."

Octavia dismounted. Fearless and excited, she put her arm through Greville's.

"I must hear what he's saying," she said; and pressing closer to him, she whispered, "Don't send me away from you, *please*."

"What I say isn't new," came the voice from the balcony. "We are warned against always seeking after some new thing. We see drab and crowded areas, idle workmen, empty churches, youthful criminals, and drunken people. . . . We know that all this is wrong; but what sacrifice do we make for our beliefs? To say you believe, and to do nothing, is living a lie! God requires truth in the inward parts . . ."

Waterborough's words were kindled by a white fire. He was not conscious of his hearers; they had ceased to exist for him.

Tilbury, who had been separated from Octavia, made his way back with difficulty.

"For God's sake," he said to Greville, "get her out of this! I'll take the horses. Look out there, or you'll get kicked!"

While Greville and Tilbury were backing the horses Octavia struggled forward to reach the inn.

A hatless, fanatical-looking fellow thrust a leaflet into her hands. Standing in front of her, he said:

"Read this, and you'll know what we're fighting for. It's down with fox-hunting and up with Waterborough! Where are your colours? You must show your colours if you're one of us."

"Help me to get on to that trolly," she answered, not liking the look on his face.

"Why should I help you?" he said. "What have you done for us—you—who spoil land that isn't yours and torture poor wild animals? Why should any of us help you?"

"That's right, Mick, give it her!" said a woman, shoving up to them. "Last week you spoilt my chicken-run, and Farmer Webster says as how his gate was left open and his cows got loose among the motor-cars."

Hot, surrounded, and powerless, Octavia said:

"If you'll only be quiet and let me hear your candidate, I'll compensate you."

"What about my pigs!" shouted another with a laugh. "Last night it was to be equal opportunities for us all!"

By this time Octavia could see the people were not listening; curiosity was moving them forward and cat-calls and whistles from the back were breaking up the meeting. A drunken man put his arm round her waist.

"Come to me, dearie. . . . Come . . . we'll get you there shomehow. . . ."

More angry than frightened, Octavia felt his alcoholic breath upon her cheek and his arm tightening round her. She was about to protest when a woman's voice called out:

"Give over, Bill!"

"Chorus, boys—chorus. All together!" shouted the drunkard; and in a high falsetto voice he sang:

*"I'm her shweetheart—she's my dove!*

*I'm her chosen—she's my love!"*

Pushing through the people after leaving the horses with Tilbury, Greville saw Octavia with the drunken man's arm round her waist. White with rage, he raised his stick to



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try and reach him. A man next to him put a hand on his arm.

“Steady, sir—some of these chaps are drunk. If you have a row we shall never get the young lady into the inn.”

Saying this, they pushed the man away, and dodging the crowd, Greville and Octavia walked into the “Anchor and Dolphin.”

## CHAPTER XV

### *FAREWELL*

WHEN they got into the inn Greville received a message to say that he was wanted at Chivers. A man had come to see him about a speech he was to deliver in Sheffield the following week.

Crumpling up the paper, he turned to Octavia.

"I don't like leaving you," he said, "but I'll send Waterborough, and bring Tilbury to take you to St. Mildred's if I can find him."

"I'll wait for you."

"Will you?" he said. "I won't be long."

Greville hesitated, as if he was going to say something; then opened the door of the back parlour.

"I would rather wait for you," she said, looking at him as she passed into the room.

There was a feeble yellow glow in a fire smothered in coal-dust. Woollen antimacassars hung over a horsehair sofa and a stuffed salmon ornamented the top of a chest of drawers. On either side of the mantelpiece were lithographs of John Bright and Sir Mortimer Coventry. The atmosphere was cold and stuffy, and you could hear the voices of men drinking at the bar.

Octavia pulled a chair up to the fire and sat with her feet in the cinders.

Waterborough came in. She explained how she had missed the hounds, and had listened to him speaking in the market-place.



## FAREWELL

"Tell me, are all your meetings like that?"

"How d'you mean? It was not a political meeting. I said I would preach them a sermon. I saw nothing; to tell you the truth, I was looking above their heads."

"You were speaking above their heads, weren't you?"

"I don't think so. We discussed this the day Pelham took me to see you."

"Tell me, what was it you were explaining?" said Octavia.

"The indifference that paralyses action. Life is terrifyingly short, and the question is how it should be lived without being spent. We must rouse ourselves, and rouse each other," he said.

"You roused them all right," said Octavia.

"You didn't approve?"

"Yes, I did; but it's funny how cross people get directly anything is said about religion."

"Cross?"

"Well, I mean excited. They shoved, and shouted, and jostled; some of them didn't even listen."

"That's so," he said, looking at his boots. "People don't listen. But I wasn't speaking of religion, unless you call Christ a religious man," said he, walking to the window. "I want to get into Parliament to see what can be done to clothe and feed the majority of my fellow-workmen. Do you realize the dead weight of these *necessities* on men and women who want to be free to live?"

"Yes; I think I do," said Octavia.

"They don't ask for pleasure, they only ask for opportunity; and when it comes they're not in a position to take it. Maybe they've no boots—or no stomach, and not enough money to pay a bus. The men sometimes can't leave their sick wives, or the mothers their sick children, and the only people who know of their distress live in the same squalor."

Octavia was moved.

"But the rich do help them sometimes," said she; and, as if shocked by the thinness of her words, she added: "You think our help is only in spasms; that we should give up more of our money . . ."

"Not only your money, but your time, your thoughts, your prayers. There's a text which says, 'Neither will I give of that which costeth me nothing.' How many people give of what costs them anything?"

"Is there anyone down here who understands you, Mr. Waterborough?" said Octavia, looking at him.

"Pelham's the only man who cares. His whole life's dedicated to what he thinks right."

"But he doesn't enjoy himself."

"That's so; he doesn't enjoy himself," replied Waterborough. Silence fell upon them.

"I suppose that's why you get on together. You wouldn't think it right to enjoy yourself, would you, Mr. Waterborough?" said Octavia, stirring the fire with her boot.

"I've never thought about it; but it's as you say. The reason he and I get on is that we're sojourners in a strange land. He and I are . . ."

At that moment a falsetto voice broke upon their ears and mixed with the smell of beer and tobacco:

*"I'm her shweetheart—she's my dove!  
I'm her chosen—she's my love;  
Moonlight streaming—Heaven's above!  
Tra la-la la-la, la-la -  
La—LA—LA."*

The door burst open and Bill of the market-place staggered into the room:

"By all that's bloody!—who are you that's got my girl!" he said, swaying towards them with pink, peering eyes and hands in his pockets. Realizing that if the candidate was recognized it might do him harm, Octavia jumped



## FAREWELL

up and, putting her arm round Bill's shoulders, said in a coaxing voice :

"Yes, yes ! I'm your girl !" and turning him round, she pointed to the door. "Come along with me ; let's get away."

Steadied by surprise, Bill took his eyes off Waterborough and stared at her.

"You're a daisy, you are ! Well, give us a kiss ! . . ." he said, chucking her under the chin.

"No, I'm damned !" said Tilbury, coming into the room with Greville. Before anyone could interfere, he had seized Bill by the neck and shot him on to his back in the passage, an action that was received with roars of delight by the men at the bar.

"I see no object in these people recognizing you, Mr. Waterborough. I'd like to go home. Is the motor there ?"

"Thank you, Miss Daventry. I must go. Are you coming, Pelham ?" said the candidate, moving towards the door.

"Just a moment," said Greville. He went up to Octavia, and after scanning her face anxiously, said : "I'm afraid you're very, very tired. Did you have a good talk ?"

"We had a wonderful talk. I love him !" she replied.

Seeing Tilbury approaching, Greville left Octavia.

The sun had gone down ; the room was dark. After gazing at Octavia, Tilbury kicked the fire into a blaze. Dumb with admiration, he said :

"My God ! as they say in church, you saved the situation. That brute would have gone about saying Waterborough had been found dallying with a lady. . . . Look here, I want to tell you something."

A servant-girl opened the door.

"If you please, Mr. Pelham's left this note and his overcoat for the lady. The motor's at the door."

Tilbury wrapped Octavia up in Greville's coat, and after helping her into the motor sat down beside her.

"Well, go on ; what is it you wanted to tell me ?" said Octavia, squeezing the note into her pocket. Tilbury paused.

"You said an awfully clever thing one night at dinner, you know. You said you always skipped the preface with people. I said to myself, 'She's right !' Did you mean it ? Is that true, Miss Octavia ?"

"You can call me Octavia if you like. You see, I'm living up to my principles ; I'm skipping the preface. What is it you wanted to tell me ?"

Tilbury fidgeted.

"Well, I hope you won't mind, but *I . . .* I mean *you . . .* The long and short of it is I love you ; I've never met anyone like you, and a chap can't give more than his love, can he ?"

Surprised beyond all measure, Octavia looked at his flushed and youthful face. She took his hand and said :

"You're a *great* dear ! You mustn't imagine I'm indifferent to your love ; but what do you want me to say ?"

"I don't want you to say anything. But you're young . . . and . . . I thought . . . I just thought I'd tell you."

The horn tooted and the motor stopped.

Hawkins met them on the doorstep, and perceiving a look of dejection on Tilbury's face urged him to come in and have a brandy and soda. He assured him he must be getting back, and as the chauffeur—like most other domestics—had often profited by his lordship's open-handedness, he was only too willing to motor Tilbury to Dashington.

Octavia was not only longing to read the letter the maid had given her, but was overcome with lassitude, and did not feel equal to asking him to come in. They stood upon the doorstep.

"Afraid you're very, *VERY* tired. Shoot off to bed and forget everything. Turn your face to the wall and make your mind a blank."



## FAREWELL

Tilbury lifted his hat, and getting into the motor slammed the door before Octavia could say good-bye.

Diving into the pocket of Greville's great-coat—which came below her knees—she took out her letter, and asked Hawkins what the time was.

He informed her that the gentlemen had not returned from hunting. He said he would send her tea up to her bedroom, and stooping, he lifted the coat which had fallen from her shoulders to the ground.

Walking slowly upstairs, Octavia shut the door of her bedroom and opened her letter.

*Dear Miss Daventry,*

*It was more than stupid of me not to say good-bye to you. I am kept at Chivers to-night, and have to go to London to-morrow. Only a scrawl to say how fine I thought you to-day in the crowd. Waterborough's always a day after the fair, but begged me to thank you. He'll love you to the end of his days. Fare well.*

*Yours,  
G. P.*

He had gone away and had not even said good-bye! Was he coming back? Of course, it was very nice to be told that Waterborough loved her; very nice indeed. . . . How conventional to sign yourself "G.P."! Nothing she hated like initials. Octavia read the letter again, then flinging her clothes on the floor, she got into bed.

"Don't you want your letters, miss?" asked Jenkins. "There's one from your father, and one from Master Dick."

"Surely papa hasn't written!—why, someone must be ill!" she said. Pushing the tray away from her, she tore the letter open.

Mr. Daventry—who had never been known to stay out of England for more than the shortest time—told Octavia that on their return from Cannes they had found their son Joe far from well, and that the Edinburgh doctor feared the after-effects of pleurisy. He said that though there was

nothing to be alarmed about, he would like Octavia to return home as early as was convenient.

When Octavia had finished reading the letter she wrote a telegram and gave it to her maid :

*Unless you wire to contrary to-morrow morning, will take night train to Galashiels. Dear love to all.*

*Octavia.*

This, of course, changed everything. Lying back on the pillows, she reflected :

An Edinburgh doctor sounded bad. She wished she had written to Joe ; but she would go abroad with him if he was really ill. After all, it was just as well she *was* going. If only her father's letter had come directly after her talk with Susan about Robin she would not have found it difficult. In fact, she had dined in bed on that very idea the night of the Waterborough meeting. She was undoubtedly fickle, and what she had said at Dunross was still true—that what delighted her on Monday was tolerated Tuesday, hated Wednesday, and enchanted her again on Thursday. And how well Robin had taken it !—he had merely lit a cigar and said she was like a sea wind in a stuffy room. He would never say that now ; not he ! Somehow or other he had changed ; their moods never seemed to meet. When provoked by Greville's inexpressiveness, it was only natural she should turn to Robin ; but he did not seem to care. He didn't even like her when she put her head on his shoulder. And *she* enjoyed his love so much !—it made all the difference to her. . . . Now she never knew if he was going to be gay or cross, easy or censorious, praising or frowning. Could it be that he was falling into that tiresome habit at the back of men's minds—that they *must* propose ? It was almost better to be with Greville Pelham, who didn't care if she was alive or dead, and wouldn't notice if she dressed herself in a sponge-bag.



## FAREWELL

"G. P. !" . . . How non-conducting ! And yet . . . and yet he was different somehow . . . and Waterborough said he was good. . . . Was she never going to see him again ? . . .

She looked at the flowers in her room ; the roses and lilies of the valley which had arrived as usual in the morning. Poor Tilbury ! She did not like to think of him unhappy. . . .

Octavia was startled by a knock at the door.

"Aren't you coming down ? We're back ; I must hear all about what happened to you to-day."

"All right, Robin ! I'll be down in a jiffy."

The door opened a few inches : Octavia hid Greville's letter.

"I'm not coming in," said Robin in a lowered voice, "but is it true what Jenkins tells my servant, that you're going away to-morrow ? Why do you go, Octavia ? Are you sure it's necessary ?"

"Go down, and I'll tell you everything. I can't dress while you're talking," said Octavia, throwing back the eider-down and thrusting her feet into her slippers.

The Chinese peignoir was hanging over an arm-chair ; her stockings and underclothes arranged in front of the fire. She pulled her white dressing-gown off the bed and, fastening it hastily with safety-pins, concealed the temporary arrangement by tying a sash of vivid pink round her waist. She regretted wasting even a moment of her shortened time in her bedroom. When she had finished arranging her hair she ran down to the library.

Robin was walking up and down in a state of mind hitherto unknown to him. When Octavia came into the room, he shut the door and put his back against it. He looked at her in silence as she stood in front of him. The strain of the day and the crowd, the speech, Waterborough's conversation, Tilbury's avowal, and her news from Dunross, had made Octavia's eyes very large, and the fur round her neck en-

hanced the pallor of her little face. To Robin she was no longer the lovely child of the beech walk. She was a woman.

"Come here," he said, "and look at me. You're not vexed that you've kept away from me the whole day, are you? You can't be angry with me on your last day!"

Catching her tight by the wrists, he pressed her hands to his face and, lowering his voice, said:

"Say it wasn't because I was churlish that you kept away from me all day. Listen! They will be back any moment and we shan't have another chance of being alone. Let me come and say good-bye to you in your bedroom to-night."

"Yes, of course you can; only I can't talk very late, because I'm ever so tired. How could you suppose, dearest, that I could be cross with you all day?" she said, lifting her face to his with an expression of tenderness.

Voices were heard in the hall. Robin pushed her into an arm-chair, and crossing the room with the rapidity of an acrobat placed himself erect against the mantelpiece.

They heard Jessica discussing orders for the following day, and a moment later she came into the room, followed by her husband and Sir Harry.

"I believe we all missed a wonderful meeting to-day, Octavia; your friend Waterborough—who seems to be a sort of saint—preached a sermon from the balcony of that lovely inn, the 'Anchor and Dolphin,' and they tell me it was *most* moving," she said.

"Crowds are easily moved," said her husband. "The fellow's not a politician, he's a parson, and he's upsetting the whole place. What possible good can it do to say all the rich down here are knaves!"

"Does he say that? He would be nearer the truth if he had said most of them were fools," replied his wife languidly. Turning to Robin, she asked if he and Octavia had enjoyed themselves. Then, as if remembering something she should have told them before, she said:

"By the by, Octavia, Lady Julia wants you to stay at



## FAREWELL

Stanton Starkey. She gave me this very characteristic note, asking if I thought there was anything she could do to induce you to go."

"How nice of her! Read it to us," said Octavia, relieved at not having to answer Jessica's first question.

*Dear Miss Daventry,*

*My son Guy asks me to write and say how glad we should be to see you here on the termination of your visit to St. Mildred's. You will find it a dull house, only Guy and myself, but we will endeavour to make you comfortable for a week or ten days.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Julia Coventry.*

"I consider this a very great compliment," said Jessica, handing the letter to Octavia. "Guy will most likely propose to you, darling. Did he talk to you to-day?"

"Dear Mrs. Brabazon, you can't be serious!—I've never heard the Master finish a sentence in my life," said Octavia. Pleased at the turn the conversation had taken, she proceeded to relate her day's adventures, and ended by telling them with what regret she was leaving St. Mildred's, as having received a letter about her brother's illness she was obliged to return to Dunross.

Colonel and Mrs. Brabazon were distressed to hear this; for though Octavia's visit had been of the promised length, they realized their house would be less frequented and amusing when she left it. After they had expressed their regret, they retired to dress for dinner.

Exhausted from the adventures of the day, and perturbed over Greville's departure, Octavia longed to get right away. The thought of the Professor and the talks she would have with him, and the peace of the moors, consoled her for leaving Harbington. Nevertheless, she made up her mind that she would make a success of her last evening. Without being conscious of it, Octavia had an inborn sense of drama which gave life to everything she did. Her idea of a swan-song

was that it should not only be audible and moving, but impressive, and remembered. However much she might miss Robin, Sir Harry, and her hosts, she was determined that they should miss her more.

She put on the dress she had worn the first evening of her visit and, flushed with excitement, joined her host and hostess.

Octavia was not the only person who had made up her mind that the last evening should be a success. Robin Compton was equally anxious to create a favourable impression. He had never spoken to Octavia about Greville. He had not had the opportunity of seeing them together. He knew that when Octavia was out hunting she was too absorbed to think of anything, and that when she had been laid up she had seen little of him. The only time he had watched them together he observed that Greville's conversation interested Octavia, and fearing she might miss it, he took infinite trouble to be agreeable at dinner. Like a gambler having a last throw, he hoped against hope that luck might turn his way in his midnight assignation. Octavia, who had never seen him take any trouble to talk well in public, was surprised, and felt a certain resentment that her departure should be taken so lightly.

As the evening advanced, the conversation turned upon practical matters. It was decided that Robin should ride Octavia's horses till she returned. She told them she was going to London the next day ; and with many promises of a future visit the company broke up.

Alone in her bedroom, Octavia saw Dick Filmer's letter where she had left it, and feeling conscious of neglect, she opened it.

GLASGOW.

*Wasn't I right ? How much time have you wasted upon the clerk on a stool ? Never mind—I understand ; and was too glad to hear you weren't hurt. The Lord be praised ! Christ-*



## FAREWELL

*mas is coming soon and we'll be at Dunross together. There are an awful lot of Socialists in this part of the world, but I'm not at all surprised, as it's crowded with rich chaps, who neither give, nor have, any fun for their money. The employers have a much greater feeling against the workmen than they have against their employers.*

*I've got a present for you. I bought a jolly old sporting print of an inn called the "Anchor and Dolphin"—somewhere near you.*

*The Harbington hounds are seen killing their fox—to all appearances in summer, as every tree is in full leaf and the ladies in the foreground have got their parasols up.*

*Yours—at any rate no one else's—*

*Dick.*

Octavia's mind was too absorbed in the perplexities of the moment to dwell upon Dick, or his conversion by the Glasgow Socialists. Crumpling the letter in her fingers, she went to her dressing-table and examined herself slowly in the looking-glass.

Hers was not the sort of face she admired: she had always envied regular features. She wished she had never seen herself before, so that she could know exactly what she looked like to other people. She reflected with a sigh that no one would have thought that she was sixteen if she had had the measured beauty of a lady in a mezzotint, or the dignity and perfection of her mother's nose.

Too tired to go to bed, she sat down and reflected upon the situation. Robin's visit indicated that a crisis was imminent, and a feeling of defeat would have overcome her had she not known that sooner or later this was bound to happen. She had no fears of her own resolution, but she did not want to alienate her lover.

To receive a man in her bedroom was nothing to her. Having been delicate, her mother had never allowed her to stay downstairs after eleven, and both Dick, the Professor,

and other guests had spent hours talking to her in her bedroom. She recalled how, upon one occasion, to avoid being sent to bed early, she had gone so far as to put pink tooth-paste on her cheeks so that no one could say she looked pale or tired. But Dick had been horrified by her action, and she had not repeated it. She could not forget that the only time she had invited Robin to come to her bedroom he had refused, implying that she was improper. He had evidently changed his views, as his visit that night was his own suggestion.

There was something rather nice about a man like Robin being so easily shocked. She must be sweet to him on this her last night ; but she must be careful not to shock him. In any case, she had better not receive him in bed, but would undress, and put on the dressing-gown with fur that she felt Robin had admired when he suggested coming to say Good night to her.

She turned out some of the lights, stirred up the fire, and placed a comfortable chair next to her own. Fearing Sir Harry—whose bedroom was in the passage—might hear Robin's footsteps, she had taken the precaution of leaving the door ajar ; and after sipping her milk and nibbling a biscuit, she settled herself among the cushions of her arm-chair and fell into a deep sleep.

Although Robin had objected to Octavia's midnight habits at Dunross, on this occasion he blessed them. He said to himself : " Even if she were not going away to-morrow, she won't think there is anything unusual in my coming to say good night to her. This will make everything much less difficult. But whatever happens, I must hold myself in restraint, so as not to shock her. It would be intolerable if, on the last occasion we shall be alone, she were to be either snubbing or on the defensive."

Nevertheless, he felt more nervous than he would have confessed when—after a harassing wait—he looked at the clock, and satisfying himself that both Sir Harry and his



## FAREWELL

hosts must by this time be asleep, he crept down the passage with the noiseless footfall of a burglar.

Standing on the threshold of her bedroom, he did not immediately perceive her. After closing the door he observed Octavia lying asleep in the arm-chair.

The window was open and not a leaf stirred. He saw the moon high above the sleeping garden, and strands of mist rising over the lawn and fields. The tick of the clock was loud and flurried. The noise of the night seemed to throb all round him. He took one step forward and looking at her lying in all her loveliness, he reflected unsteadily that the wisest thing he could do would be to go away and leave her; leave her folded in her dreams, protected by his unassailable love.

He heard the long, loud whistle of the midnight express as it plunged into the Harbington tunnel. Octavia awoke.

Warm and startled, she stood up and looked at him. There was an expression on his face with which she was not familiar.

"Have you been here long?" she asked.

Forgetting all his resolves and moved by an overwhelming emotion, he returned her look in silence. She wanted to speak, but her words fluttered.

"Are you glad to be leaving me, Octavia? . . . Don't you mind? . . . Or do you want me to go away for always?" he said, a little hoarsely.

Barely awake, she could not laugh away the fervour of his eyes. For a moment they stood trembling in unison; then he folded her in his arms.

Releasing her at last, he sat down and lifted her on to his knees. Holding her close to him, he said caressingly:

"Don't you find it good to be loved? Say you like it—just say it *once*."

"You know I do. It's sweet to be loved—never to be scolded, never to be snubbed, never to be disapproved of. Ah! Robin, I'm going away, but whatever happens, or

whatever I do, say you won't forget to care for me. Tell me I shan't shock you . . . I shan't disappoint you ; but that you'll go on just the same—just the same . . .” she said, half tipsy with fatigue and burying her face in his coat. He tried to lift her head, but she hid it all the closer.

“Don't look at me!—don't say anything. If you have to speak, say I'm tired, and not myself . . . say . . .”

“But, my heart's darling, you can't want everything to go on just as it is ? You can't like things to stand still. Do you only want my love now and then ? . . . Now and then is so precarious ! You've just said I must never forget to care for you. Look at me, Octavia. . . . Do you want my love without me ?”

She murmured something, but he could not hear her.

The fire glowed and flickered. There was a long silence—a silence that beat like a pulse.

“You know, my dear darling, even *you* can't command love ; it won't obey—it won't stand still. Tell me I am part of your desire, as you're the whole of mine. This isn't asking much. I can't give you more than the whole, and you can't give me less than the half.”

She pressed herself warm and close to him. After a pause he disentangled her head from his shoulder and, turning her face up to his, repeated :

“Do you want my love without me ?”

She put her lips to his ear and whispered :

“Yes.”

“Then let me go !” he said, getting up and pushing her away from him. “Why did you make me love you ? Let me go !”

Thoroughly awakened, she held him fast, and forcing him to sit down, placed herself upright on his knee.

“You see, dearest,” she said, a little tremulously, “we know one another *so* well ! We are imprisoned by the only kind of love which is of any use to us. Why do you want to open the doors and let it all escape ? I have got your com-



## FAREWELL

panionship, your understanding and, off and on, your love; why are you so unreasonable? And why be hurt when I say I want your love without you?"

"It is *you* who are off and on! When has my love ever been off? When, may I ask, has it ever failed you? You know perfectly well what I mean. Let me go!"

He got up and went to the door.

"You aren't going to leave me like this on my last night, are you? Just sit down and listen." Seeing him hesitate, she said: "You shouldn't have come if you weren't going to listen to me. I didn't ask you to come. I just said 'Yes' when you said you wanted to. You say I know what you mean. You're indignant that I should want your love without you; and yet, Robin, you've known this all the time."

"It's the first time you've said it. Once words are spoken, you can't unsay them. They're never forgotten, but always repeated."

Gathering all the courage that was left to her, she said:

"Well! Supposing I say I *do* understand what you mean! It comes to this: you think you can throw off all your old life and have a new one. I'm to be your new life. You think your soul is crying out to mine, and instead of saying, 'It is I!' you are saying, 'It is *you*!' But it isn't. I'm not what you think me. I can't make an honest man of you—I'm not good enough; and I don't want to be engaged. It's like sipping at a cup, and when I taste I want to drink deep. I tell you when I love, I shall love with the whole of me, and for ever. Don't ask me to engage myself; you spoil everything, and I tell you I *can't*! . . . I CAN'T!"

He stood in silence away from her. She went up to him and, putting her hands upon his shoulders, lifted her face—with a look half of laughter half of tears.

"And you know, beloved, you promised one day—when you were in your most delicious humour—that you would never, *never* ask me to marry you."

After a long pause, he said in the steadiest voice he could command :

“ But, my sweet darling, I haven’t proposed.”

Her colour quickened ; his hands dropped.

“ Don’t go ! ” she said, following him to the door.

“ Please, *please*, Robin, don’t go ! ”

“ *I must*,” he answered. And holding her for a minute against him, he left the room.



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MASTER

AFTER a night of sleepless misery Octavia dozed into the dawn. Jenkins came in with a telegram. She woke with a start.

"I'm sorry, miss ! but you said I was to bring in any telegrams that came ; and it's eleven o'clock."

"Good heavens !" said Octavia, sitting up and tearing open the telegram.

*Joe better. Stay where you are and join us later : letter following. Love. Mother.*

This was really unendurable ! To see Robin, to talk to Jessica, and to repeat a single farewell, would be discordant and impossible.

Octavia shared her father's irritability at changes of plan. With the irrelevant trick that memory plays upon a brain that is thinking of something else, she recalled an occasion at Dunross when, after seeing a friend off from the front door, the lady had returned for a forgotten purse and had found the whole family clapping their hands on the doorstep.

She re-read the telegram, and exhausted by her long sleep she lay back on her pillow, unable to come to any decision. Jenkins came in with her breakfast.

"Here's a note, miss, which was found on the floor last night."

Octavia read the letter Lady Julia had written to her. Seized with a sudden idea, she said :

"We're not going to Scotland after all, Jenkins. Master Joe's better. Go and ask Hawkins to telephone to Stanton Starkey and ask Lady Julia if I can go to her to-day, tell her I'm leaving St. Mildred's—and say I should be ever so grateful if it doesn't put her out."

Whatever else happened she would not remain where she was. If Lady Julia could not take her in, she would propose herself to Susan Malet; but she preferred Stanton Starkey, as no one there was likely to ask her any questions.

Lady Julia's answer was that she would be delighted to receive Miss Daventry, and would send the motor over for her.

Pleading a headache, Octavia remained in her bedroom and wrote to Jessica. Enclosing her telegram, she explained as well as she could that she was going to Stanton Starkey for a few days before joining her parents in Scotland.

Jessica was always called late, and, having said good-bye to Octavia the night before, had no reason to get up. When her maid came in with her breakfast there were two letters on her tray; one from Octavia, explaining her change of plans, and the other from Robin:

*Dreadfully sorry, but fear I must go to Ireland. The man at Kilmallock wants me to see two horses he's got. They'll probably make all the difference to my sale at Tattersalls. I will write and tell you my movements.*

"Tell Mr. Compton I'll be down in a minute, will you, Marie?" said Jessica.

"Monsieur est déjà parti, madame," replied the maid.

Jessica was too experienced not to realize that something must have happened to make both her guests leave St. Mildred's at the same moment, but when she joined Octavia she saw by the expression on her face that it would be tactless to question her.

"You're quite right to go to Stanton Starkey, darling.



## THE MASTER

It will be a complete change, and a new experience. The Master is a unique creature, and you can come back to us if you don't go abroad. At any moment you'll be welcome. Your brother seems really better, so you mustn't be unhappy."

Octavia was too moved to reply, and assured her hostess she was the best friend any woman could have. The motor arrived from Stanton Starkey and she went up to her room.

A bunch of violets was on her table and a letter in Robin's handwriting. After squeezing the violets into her muff Octavia went downstairs and said good-bye to Jessica.

She pulled the rug round her in the motor and opened the letter. "My love" was all that was in it.

Octavia took the violets out of the paper, and burying her face in them she burst into tears.

A white-haired butler guided her through the enormous front hall and an equally big ante-chamber into the room where Lady Julia Coventry was sitting.

"Glad you've come, Miss Daventry. I'm afraid you won't find the house amusing. Marmaduke is away. Sit down; Guy will be in soon. He doesn't know you're coming. Are you hunting to-morrow?"

Octavia expressed her gratitude to Lady Julia and said she would like to hunt, but had made no arrangements.

"In that case you had better write a telephone message to your groom. We'll take you to the meet. Tell me, how do you like our country?"

Octavia was attracted by Lady Julia's plain face and uncompromising manner, and admired the lace on her cap and the satin slippers peeping from under her full black skirts. She expatiated on the pleasure she felt when hunting with the Harbington.

"And what do you think of our young men here? I suppose you know most of them?" said Lady Julia.

"They're very different, aren't they?"

"They are, indeed. There's Tilbury, he's the best-

looking ; and Compton, he rides the best ; and Pelham, the only one with brains. I've seen nothing of him lately, but he was a handsome, quarrelsome boy. I hear he's back again and supports the Labour man who is fighting this by-election. If you know him, you can tell him from me he is wasting his time. We aren't going to give up fox-hunting to have the honour of being represented in the House of Commons by a preacher."

"But, Lady Julia, he doesn't want to stop fox-hunting. He's really a wonderful man, and I'm sure you'd like him," said Octavia.

"I like all men, my dear, but parsons aren't men. How do you like our women ?"

"I don't know any, except Jessica Brabazon and Susan Malet."

"Don't you know Pelham's mother ?"

"No."

"She's full of curious notions ; but she's the only really good woman I can forgive."

"Don't you like women ?"

"I find them dull, dangerous and dishonourable ; and when you're older you'll come to the same conclusion. The only advantage of being a woman is that you can't marry one—as someone or other said."

The door opened, and a tramping of heavy feet was heard upon the stone floor. Sir Guy came into the room covered with mud. He stood in the doorway while a tall footman knelt down and took off his spurs. On seeing Octavia he emitted a sound, half whistle, half chuckle.

"By Gad !" he said.

"Yes, Guy, you see you're not always right. Miss Daventry accepted my invitation."

He shook hands with Octavia ; after which no one spoke.

"What sort of sport did you have ? Not many out, I suppose, from Dashington ? They like the special train days," said Lady Julia, breaking the silence.



## THE MASTER

"Tilbury was there, riding like a lunatic. Bedlam's his place. He must be in love!"

"Guy doesn't like Tilbury."

"Can't say I do," said the Master.

"I like cheerful, handsome men," said Lady Julia.

"Cheerful, by Gad! He looked like killing himself; and with luck he'd have done it! What about to-morrow? I'll drive you to the meet. D'you like driving?" said the Master, turning to Octavia.

"Very much. May I telephone to my groom?"

"Tell him we're in the woods. D'you like woods?"

"I'm afraid I don't," replied Octavia.

"You're wrong not to like woods," said the Master, after which there was a pause.

Lady Julia broke the silence:

"We must get someone to dine to-morrow."

"I'm perfectly happy here; you mustn't think of me at all," said Octavia.

The servant came into the room.

"Lord Tilbury wants to know if he can dine to-morrow, my lady."

"Say we shall be delighted to see him at eight o'clock."

"Tilbury, by Jove!" exclaimed the Master. "Where's the cat?"

"He's always downstairs now. Did you kill your fox, Guy?"

"Kill him? I should say so!"

After tea Sir Guy said to Octavia:

"You look white; you're tired—eh?"

"Show Miss Daventry her room, Guy. I must speak to Joliffe and tell her not to feed the cat. Housekeepers spoil every pet," said Lady Julia.

The Master conducted Octavia down a long stone corridor, past several statues standing in alcoves between high mahogany doors.

"There's where you put your letters," he said, pointing

to a post-box. After what seemed an endless tramp he pushed a door open. "Will you be all right here? Gad! there's the cat!"

An enormous grey Persian was stretched in front of the fire.

"If you want anything it's no good ringing. The bells don't work."

"How shall I get my maid?" said Octavia.

"Shout," he replied. "Are you riding the grey to-morrow?"

"No, I'm riding Kilmallock. Just wait a moment. I forgot to telephone to my groom."

Sir Guy stood and watched her, his huge figure obscuring the doorway.

"Glad you aren't riding the grey. We don't want to lose you, you know," he said, taking the slip of paper from Octavia.

"Havoc's too strong for me."

"You're weak."

"Oh no, I'm not; only he's headstrong."

"Compton couldn't ride him. He didn't tell you that, I suppose? Didn't see him myself, but heard he swore."

"I expect he did," said Octavia, feeling as tongue-tied as the Master.

"Shout if you want anything," he said as he left the room.

Octavia put her violets in water and was taking stock of her large dark bedroom when there was a loud knock. The Master opened the door.

"Better give me the cat."

Octavia lifted the heavy cat from the hearthrug.

"D'you like my mother?" he said, holding the cat in his arms.

"I delight in her, Sir Guy. She notices everything. I hope she'll like me."

"I don't expect women like you much, do they?" he said.



## THE MASTER

"I don't know why you should think that," said Octavia.

"Don't you? Gad! I do," he said, dropping the cat and picking it up again.

The next day they drove to the meet in a brougham, and after a long morning spent in the woods Sir Guy came up to Octavia.

"Afraid you've been dull. Where was Compton?"

"He's gone to Ireland to buy horses."

"You like Compton, don't you?" said the Master, eyeing her.

"Yes. Don't you?" said Octavia.

"So-so," was the reply.

The Master entered into a discussion with Haycock and, deciding to draw towards the kennels, the field dispersed.

Without Sir Harry, Robin, or Tilbury—who always avoided woodland meets—Octavia found everything much less exciting, and as she trotted back in a drizzle behind the hounds she felt the hunting world had suddenly become suffocatingly dull.

When she got to Stanton Starkey she found a letter from her mother:

*I'm afraid our change of plans will upset you, darling. Your father had to return from Cannes and we found Joe far from well. He is so seldom ill we had a fright; but the day after your father wrote to you he was better, and the doctor thinks it will be time enough to settle where he is to winter later on, so do not hurry if you are enjoying yourself. We were glad your fall was not serious. Let us know when you'll come. . . .*

Octavia was relieved at her mother's news. She wrote a long letter to Joe, telling him she would go to Scotland at the end of the week.

Lord Tilbury did not succeed in making the dinner amusing, and had it not been for Lady Julia, Octavia would have taken the first train to Dunross.

The windows rattled, the bells would not ring, the bath-water was cold, and the lights were so arranged that she could neither see herself in the looking-glass nor read in bed. She did not care to ride Havoc while Robin was away, and though she had had a day on Kilmallock and one on Cunning Kate, she did not wish to encourage Tilbury, whose devotion was becoming conspicuous.

On the last afternoon of her visit she was alone with Lady Julia.

"You and the Master have been ever so kind to me, Lady Julia; I can't thank you enough," she said.

"So you're leaving us to-morrow, are you?"

"Yes. I've been a long time away from my people."

"You like hunting here, don't you?"

"I adore it."

"Would you like to come here every winter?"

"Nothing I should like better."

"We shouldn't all bore you, you think?" said Lady Julia.

"How can you say such a thing! I'm never bored."

"D'you think you could settle down in this country?"

"Certainly, for the winter," said Octavia.

"No one stays here in the summer, my dear. That would be asking too much."

After this Lady Julia stooped down to stroke the cat. Looking up suddenly, she said:

"Octavia, you're a young woman and I'm an old one, so we can speak frankly to one another."

"Dear Lady Julia, there's nothing you can't say to me," said Octavia, wondering whether she was going to warn her about Lord Tilbury.

"I've seen something of life, and though I was never good-looking I've seen something of men in my time, and I'd rather be unhappily married than not married at all."

"I think you're right; but I intend to be happily married."



## THE MASTER

"You'll find that very difficult, my dear. Look at all the women we know: are any of them happily married?"

"I can't think of any for the moment; but I know so few," said Octavia.

"Well, I know a great many, and believe me, the thing to do is to marry a good man, with the same tastes as yourself. The good men I knew never had my tastes—only the rubbishy ones—and you'll find it the same with yourself. The Almighty's a wonderful handicapper! You're a nice girl, and a sensible girl, but even you won't find everything in one man."

There was silence after this. Fingering a large locket set in diamonds on the bosom of her dress, and clearing her throat, Lady Julia said:

"I know a man who would like to marry you. He's a good master, a good brother, and a good son; and if you knew him as well as I do, you would love him."

Although Lady Julia began speaking with her usual vigour, her voice changed at the end of the sentence. She dropped her hands in her lap and looked at her guest.

"Do you mean Sir Guy?" said Octavia.

"I do. You may think it strange that I should be saying this to you, but Guy has never been able to express himself. For years I have looked out for a wife for him, someone good enough to appreciate him and whom I could care for myself. I didn't want you to leave this country without knowing what he feels for you."

Octavia got up and sat on the footstool at Lady Julia's feet. Taking her hand in both hers, she said:

"I'm touched by what you've told me and tremendously surprised."

"Fiddlesticks, my dear!—you're far too pretty to be surprised at any man falling in love with you."

"Not p'raps so much falling in love, but wanting to marry me," she replied.

"You've only got to look at Guy to see it's marriage or

nothing with him. He could never make love. Making love is very pleasant, but you see it every day. A lover is not a husband. You can't have both."

"Can't I?"

"No, you can't. No one has. Love like his is not made or manufactured. It is *felt*—and is there for you to keep or throw away."

"I shall make you sad, dearest Lady Julia, if I tell you I can't marry your son, shan't I?" said Octavia after a pause.

"You will; but that doesn't matter. I was afraid it would be like this. Love has different effects upon different men. It makes some confident, others embarrassed; and few men are at their best when they're in love. With women it's different. With them love-making is an art which men can never learn, and those who learn it are rotters. I married a very dull man, but as I was always in love with the wrong ones I assure you I was not only grateful, but happy. Disreputable society is empty and tiring; and pretty women slide into it with astonishing ease. Love makes Guy dull; but lively men are often silly, and serious ones are always heavy. Every man who knows my son thinks well of him; and who cares what women think?"

Octavia got up and kissed Lady Julia.

"You're a wonderful person and I do hope what you've told me won't make any difference between you and me. Will it?"

"Certainly not, my dear."

"And will it make a difference between me and the Master?"

"If he doesn't ask me, I shan't tell him."

"Will he ask you?" said Octavia.

"I doubt it," she replied.



## CHAPTER XVII

### *GREVILLE PELHAM*

HAVING telegraphed to her mother that she was travelling from London to Dunross that night, Octavia left Stanton Starkey the next day and went to her father's rooms in Brown's Hotel.

She felt overwhelmingly depressed; and after a little aimless shopping returned to the hotel. She put her elbows on the table and thought of all that had happened since the day she had left home dreaming of the wonders that awaited her in England. She recalled her talks with Greville and Waterborough; her warnings from Susan and Sir Harry; Tilbury's avowal; and the Master's emissary; and wondered if, after all, the fox she was bent on pursuing had not eluded her.

She had neglected her family, indulged herself, and dismissed her lover. With her head in her hands she went through a mental and moral general confession. She blamed herself for being so idle and material; and regretted the distance that had come between her and her prayers.

The Professor had said it was good to be reminded that this was not the only life.

"Yield thyself utterly passive and dead to this life into His hands who is Lord of a better."

These were words that at one time she had loved, though she had rebelled against them. For the moment she seemed to have lost any grip she ever had upon life, and would willingly have surrendered it.

Unable to bear the noise of the streets, the stuffy atmosphere, and the ill-placed lights in the room, she resolved she would go and say her prayers in St. Paul's Cathedral.

Leaning back in the taxi out of sight of streets and shops, she wondered whether God resented people only going to Him when they were unhappy.

When she arrived at St. Paul's she observed that except in the choir there were no lights. The sound of music filled the vast and echoing darkness. Seeing a verger, she asked if there was not going to be a service. He explained that the afternoon service was over, and the organist usually practised at that hour. He suggested she should go into the choir, where there was more light and she would hear better. She followed him up the long aisle and sat down in one of the carved pews. In the intervals of the music she heard voices : it was evident that the organist was discussing the composition he was playing with somebody.

The large spaces of the empty Cathedral, lit by a few candles, had a healing effect upon Octavia's nerves : she knelt and prayed.

When she got up from her knees, the verger approached her. He said that when the organ practice was over the Cathedral would be closed.

"Was it something new your organist was practising ?" she asked.

"I couldn't tell you, miss ; but Mr. Pelham and he had music under their arms when they came in."

"D'you mean Mr. Greville Pelham ?"

"I think that was the gentleman. He often comes here of an evening when Mr. Straker's practising," replied the verger.

"Would you be so kind as to give Mr. Pelham a message ? Tell him Miss Daventry would like to speak to him down here before he goes away."

Fearing that what she had done might stop the music and upset Greville, Octavia was relieved to hear the organ burst



into a full and triumphant chorale. Leaning back, she shut her eyes. The music was so loud that she did not hear Greville approach till he was seated beside her.

"What a joy to find you here!" he said. "I was afraid I shouldn't see you again." Seeing her eyes large and wistful, he took her hand in both his and said with infinite tenderness: "You're unhappy! Is that what brings you here?"

"Yes, I suppose it is. Do you ever come here when you're unhappy?" said Octavia.

"I come as often as I can. Especially at this time of day when I can hear the organ."

"Were you playing?"

"We were both playing. Straker and I were trying a new thing of his. Did you like it?"

The music suddenly became soft, and Octavia, feeling that talking was jarring, and out of place, did not answer.

But Greville was not in the humour to listen to music. He had never seen Octavia unhappy. Holding her hand, he moved closer to her.

"Can't I help you?" he said in a whisper.

She shook her head and turned away from him. Determined that she should not think him wooden and helpless, he said in a low voice:

"Come home with me. Straker doesn't expect me; I told him I was going."

"You'd rather stay and listen to the music, wouldn't you?" she murmured with a slight movement towards him.

"Won't you let me help you? Who has hurt you?" he asked.

Seeing tears in her eyes, his impulse was to put his arms round her; but the music stopped, and afraid lest the organist should join them, he said:

"Let's go."

She got up, and side by side they walked down the long aisle out of the Cathedral.

Having instructed the man to drive to Brown's Hotel, Greville followed her into the taxi.

"You look worn out. Lean against me and don't say a word unless you feel inclined to," he said, and not waiting for her to speak he put his arm round her.

Octavia did as she was told. Like a tired child she leant her head against his shoulder and closed her eyes.

He was afraid if he said anything she would move, and she was afraid if she spoke she would cry. They drove along the Embankment in silence. When she could trust herself to speak she said :

"Were you and the organist surprised when you got my message ? "

"Straker was playing, and never heard anything. I listened for a few minutes and then told him I had to go."

"Did he think it odd ? "

"Not at all. We'd been playing for over an hour. Are you staying in London ? "

"I'm going to Scotland to-night. My brother Joe's ill. It's not dangerous, but they want me."

"Are you going alone ? You don't look at all well. Why not stay a few days ? You could come with me to my mother."

"Do I look ill ? "

"You look worn out. Don't be foolish, Octavia. Let me take you with me."

"No ! no ! I can't—I *must* go," she said, shaking her head. Greville longed to put his arm more comfortably round her, but was afraid if he did, she might move away.

"Are you going abroad ? " she asked.

"I don't know what I'm going to do ; it depends on a lot of things. You won't stay in Scotland long, will you ? "

He did not like to ask her if she was going back to Harbington. Trying not to tighten his arm, he said :

"What time does your train go to-night ? "



"I leave at ten, and arrive at Galashiels to-morrow morning."

They were approaching Dover Street. Octavia sat up and said :

"I suppose we must say good-bye now. I would like to tell you . . ."

"I'm not going to leave you in a horrible hotel if that's what you think!—and you needn't tell me anything."

When he had paid the taxi he followed her upstairs. Opening the door of the sitting-room, she saw the table covered with roses and lilies of the valley.

"Do flowers always follow you about?" said Greville, shutting the door.

"I can't truthfully say they do. Do you ever send people flowers?"

"If I'd known you were coming I might have . . ."

"I don't believe you ever would," she said, interrupting him. Throwing her hat and coat on the sofa, she sat down.

"I know the sort of man you think I am," he said, relieved to see her a little happier. "You think I only care for dull, heavy things; but some people take longer than others to know. You're not exactly patient, are you?"

"Aren't I?"

"Well, would you say so?"

"I don't know *what* I'm like; do you?"

"D'you mean me to tell you what I think *I* am like, or what I think *you* are?" he answered.

"Both," she replied. "But I don't believe for a moment that you know what you're like. Have you ever had your fortune told?"

"A gipsy at a fair once described the woman I should love."

"Do you remember what she said?"

"Perfectly," he answered.

A waiter came into the room to lay the table for dinner. Octavia resented the interruption. The ritual of knives

and forks, salt-cellars and tumblers, and a man circulating slowly round a table was more than she could endure.

"I don't want any dinner," she said. "Tell my maid to give you my lunch-basket. I'll dine in the train."

The waiter went out of the room.

"I think I had better leave you now," said Greville, getting up and looking at her.

"Must you go? I needn't leave here for ages, you know. Of course, if you *want* to go . . ." she said, lowering her eyes.

"I'm going to telephone to my mother not to expect me for dinner. I'll come back."

Octavia watched Greville leave the room.

"Is there anything particular you want in your basket, miss?" said Jenkins, coming in and taking Octavia's coat and hat off the sofa.

"Oh, anything'll do!—How did the flowers come?"

"Lord Tilbury brought them when you were out this afternoon. I told him you might be back any moment, but he wouldn't wait. You look wretched, miss!—Whatever will your mother say when she sees you? I'll bring your blouse and skirt. You've got a brush and powder in your bag, and there's your fur coat. Don't forget your hat," said Jenkins.

Octavia took off her dress, and hurriedly slipped on her skirt and knotted the tie of her shirt. Calling her maid, she said:

"Here's my dress, Jenkins, and you can take everything with you. I don't want to spend hours at the station."

After what seemed to Octavia an interminable time, Greville returned. Standing near the door after closing it, he said: "My mother says she would like you to stay, if it's only for one night. She thinks it folly for you to travel to Scotland when you're ill. Are you determined to go?"

"I wish I could have met your mother. Didn't she think it rather odd?"



"Odd!—Why should she? My mother's the most unconventional woman in the world and loves helping anyone who is . . ." He was going to say "unhappy," but feared lest tears should return to her eyes.

"But I'm not really ill," she said, turning away; and in a voice too low for him to hear she murmured: "If I saw your mother I should probably stay."

"I can see you've made up your mind and won't let me help you," he said, without moving from the door.

Octavia did not answer. She walked to the mantelpiece. Except for the sound of the traffic, there was a long and complete silence. For several minutes he stood where he was, hoping that she would turn round, but she remained with her back to him, looking into the fire.

"Perhaps you would rather I left you," he said. "Some people hate anyone going to the station to see them off. Shall I go?"

"We'll both have to go soon," said Octavia without turning.

"*You* needn't start for hours, unless you like waiting at a station; but there's no reason I should stay—is there?—since you forbid me to help you and won't even speak to me."

She did not answer.

Putting his hand on the door handle, he said:

"I'm going."

"Stop!" she said, turning quickly. "You know you are the only person in the world who can help me?"

"How can I help you?" he said.

"By loving me," she answered, burying herself in his arms.

He held her in a passionate embrace: unknotting the tie of her blouse, he put his hand upon her breasts and kissed her throat.

Completely defeated, she allowed him to lift her in his arms. Standing up, he paused before putting her down on the sofa.

"You've known this all the time, Octavia : say you have . . . ever since I carried you up to bed. Sweet, *sweet* heart, you'll let me love you now. . . . Tell me, is there anything that can ever come between us ? "

"No . . . nothing," she said.

He kept her in his arms after he sat down ; and pushing the hair off her forehead kissed her eyes. After a long silence she disengaged herself ; sitting up, she said :

"You'll never try and find out what made me unhappy, will you ? "

"I'll only try and find out what makes you happy. It's all I've got to think of, and to live for."

"But if you love me so much now, you won't have enough love to give me when we're married : then I may be disappointed," she said.

"It isn't my *love* that will disappoint you," he said.

"But, supposing *I* disappoint *you*, and don't give you all you expect ? "

"I don't expect anything. I only want *you*—you as you are—lovely, and young, and close to me."

"We're not engaged, are we ? " she whispered.

"No. We're married. Let me look at you." Holding her away from him, he devoured her with his eyes. "You've never kissed me," he said.

"Haven't I ? " she answered, and lifting her face to his their lips met.

Freeing herself at last from him she said :

"You won't forget what you've promised, even when we're married . . . you won't ask me *anything*, will you ? "

"I shall be far too busy making love to ask you anything."

"And you won't stop me hunting ? "

"But of course not, darling !—We'll have to go to Chivers every winter. You like my uncle, don't you ? He's devoted to you."

"Yes ; but must everyone know we're going to be married ? It's more proper to wait a little, isn't it ? "



"P'raps it is ; but how long do you propose to wait ? "

"Well ; a good long time. It'll never be as nice as this again, will it ?—It couldn't be. You never see people making love after marriage, do you ? And just think how dull that will be compared to now ! "

"You mean you would like to go on just like this and no one to know ; but if we are together they'll guess. I'm not very fond of secrets."

"I think it would be nice to have a secret. I've never had one ; and it's all rather sudden, isn't it ? "

"Everything that's worth having is sudden. Love has no time-table."

"No ; but marriage has. That's why it won't be half such fun. I dread interrupting love ; and shall try and keep unmarried as long as I can ! "

"Marriage is not interrupting, but consummating love. Surely, darling of my heart, if we were to separate now you wouldn't be happy ? "

"I wonder ? " said Octavia. "We can always write."

"Do you like writing ? "

"I've read wonderful love-letters."

"I haven't !—Printed love can never be more than a literary effusion, and that's very cold. I couldn't go back to cold things now : it would kill me !—I want something to hold, and to feel—something of my own that I can keep," he said, pressing her close to him.

"Do you think you'll keep me ? " she whispered.

He did not answer. After a pause she said :

"What makes you think so ? You hardly know me."

"You have just said nothing could ever come between us. Those words are graven on my heart," he said, drawing away from her.

"But supposing I'm not as serious as you think I am," she answered, shrinking from the gravity of his eyes. "I may not love you exactly at the same time as you're loving me, and then what would you do ? "

"I would kiss you from your ankles to your throat, my sweet little love, and you would like it. I know you better than you think."

"Do you?" she said, closing her eyes.

"The only thing that could ever come between us would be my hunger to make you love me. Do you understand what that means, Octavia? Have you never felt a hunger to be loved?" he asked.

"I always feel it."

"Then let me love you now," he said. She put her hand on his lips.

"I must ask you something first," she said. "Do you promise that however much I'm inclined to tell you everything about my life, you'll stop me?"

"D'you think that would be wise?"

"Yes, yes!—I don't want to tell you *anything*. I read somewhere that newly married people should never ask each other about their past; that it was a mistake, and often did a lot of harm."

"But, my sweet darling . . ."

"No, no," she said, interrupting him. "I'll never ask you who you've loved or anything about her. Surely you couldn't tell me *everything* that's ever happened to you, could you?"

"I don't think I shall answer that."

"Then you mean to say I'm *not* your first love?" she said.

"Would you be jealous if I said you weren't?" he replied.

"Are people ever jealous of the past?"

"Sometimes," he said.

She looked at him long and thoughtfully.

"Would you like me to be jealous?" she said.

"It would depend on what you were jealous of."

"I mean *now*. Would you like me to say I mind knowing I'm not your first love?"

"Yes, I think I would. Wouldn't you rather be my first love?" he asked.



"No. I think I'd prefer you to have seen and loved heaps of lovely women, and then after meeting me feel as if none of them had ever existed!"

"That's precisely what I do feel."

"D'you mean to say that you've loved as many women as all that?" she said, looking at him with wonder in her eyes.

"If I thought it would make you love me, I would tell you all about them. Would you like that?" he said, with a slow smile.

"It wouldn't be very nice of me, but I confess it would interest me tremendously."

"In the books you've read is it only *after* marriage that talking about the past does harm? May lovers tell each other everything?"

"I think it was only newly-married couples: I forget if the book said anything about how lovers should behave," she said.

"Then I can ask you anything I like, can I? And nothing I say can do any harm."

"You can *tell* me. I never said you could *ask* me," she replied.

"It's to be all on my side, is it? I'm to tell you about all the women I've loved, am I?"

"It doesn't seem quite fair, does it? But if I *promise* not to mind, and not to be jealous, *then* you could tell me, couldn't you?" she said, moving closer to him.

"But it would be dreadful for me if you didn't mind anything I told you, wouldn't it? And it would take too long. We've such a short time, sweetheart, before we have to leave each other."

"But you'll come to me soon, won't you?" she said. He placed her on the sofa as if she had been china, and kneeling down put his arms round her.

"My little love," he said, "let me teach you what your book left out."

“What did my book leave out?” she asked, looking at him.

“You told me it said nothing about how lovers should behave,” he replied.

“Oh, I know all about that!” she said.

“Do you, my darling? Then why perplex yourself over things that are past? You once said to me that no one was as much alive to the present as you are. Did you mean that?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Then come to me, close—close—and let me love you.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### *ENGAGED*

**O**CTAVIA'S appearance on her arrival at Dunross caused her mother much anxiety; and it was not only her appearance. Usually the gayest of the family, she went about the house silent and preoccupied. Mrs. Daventry was shrewd enough to guess that her fatigue was not purely physical; and though she made her go to bed early, she was satisfied that rest alone would not restore her. Seeing that her daughter was not in a humour to confide in anyone, she forbore to ask her questions—an act of consideration which was not lost upon Octavia.

Joe Daventry had recovered, but he was not well, and the doctor proposed he should go to the South of France immediately after Christmas. Discussing plans did not suit Octavia. It was contrary to her nature to deceive anyone, and she feared if she pursued a policy of secrecy, Greville might think his love was merely filling a gap in her life, and he would question her sincerity. She longed to disburden herself of her secret.

She went over in her mind a hundred times her precipitate decision. Greville Pelham was the sort of man her instinct had prompted her to love from the first day she had met him. He was interested in the things she cared for; ideals which were more than books, and work which was more than theory. When she was with him she had a great desire to be clever, and when she was away from him she pondered over the problems they had discussed. She had had so much

laughter in her life that his extraordinary gravity delighted her. He was not only serious, but he had authority, and was physically attractive. She did not regret her decision. But it was one of such magnitude that at times she was appalled at the thought of what she had undertaken. Subconsciously she felt that it was not merely her own future that was involved, but the future of a man whose nature and temperament she knew little about, and whose life and happiness she might easily wreck.

Greville's love-letters were different to any she had ever received—in some ways more passionate, in others more restrained: but when she had answered them she was reminded of what he had called "literary effusions." Her letters seemed to express too well what she was not exactly feeling. She had always said writing love-letters would be the only part of an engagement she would care for, so she indulged herself freely when composing them. But after they had been posted, she felt solitary. She made up her mind that she would go and see the Professor.

One day, after leaving Sir Walter Scott's story "The Two Drovers" for her brother Joe to read, she rode across the Lammermuirs. There had been a sharp frost and the ground was hard. It was cold, and she rode fast.

Professor Horncastle was reading in front of a blazing fire in his long, low, sparsely furnished library. He got up and greeted Octavia with delight.

"I knew you would come if I didn't hurry you," he said, holding her two hands. "Now, tell me, are you well?"

He scrutinized her closely, and after ordering the servant to bring coffee he pulled a chair near his, and made her sit down. She threw her hat on the floor and clasped her knees.

After waiting for Octavia to speak the Professor said:

"If you'd stayed in England much longer, I would have proposed myself to your hosts; and then what would you have said?"



## ENGAGED

"It would have been a glorious surprise ; but there was no one there you would have cared much about. I was always hunting, you see," said Octavia.

"In that case I should not have come ; but I know some of your sporting friends and might have got on with the new ones."

"Colonel Brabazon wouldn't interest you, and I don't think you've ever talked to Robin Compton, have you ?"

"Let me think . . . Robin Compton : is that the tall man who taught you to ride ?"

"Yes."

"I've spoken to him, but I can't say I've ever talked with him."

There was a silence after this. A maid brought in the coffee. The Professor observed Octavia's eyes looking into space.

"I've missed you ever so much," she said at last.

"If I did not know you, I might think you were flattering me. From what my few sporting friends tell me they miss no one when they're hunting."

"I didn't miss you when I was riding, but when I was thinking . . ." she said.

"You've often told me that there were a thousand things you wanted to *do* ; but only two things to think about—life and love," said the Professor, watching her.

"It's true, and I thought of both."

"Two very big questions ; and I'm glad you think of them. They have a habit of keeping in sight even if you try to avoid them."

"Beloved Professor, I never shirk anything, do I ?"

"Part of you does."

"The bad part of me ?"

"No : but the little part," replied the Professor.

"I know : you mean the wild part that loves the stars and the moors ; that is right away from people. The side of me that would hate to be caught !"

Octavia said this with a sort of challenge and sat up to listen to his reply.

"No, I don't mean that. Life would be a poor affair if you lost sight of the stars. I mean the part that you think belongs to you, but which you will find as you grow older does not. As long as you keep what is yours it is little, but when you give it away it will be big."

The Professor knew the moment she arrived that Octavia had something at the back of her mind, and he was determined that she should disclose it to him in her own way. Everything she had ever told him had been introduced through a labyrinth of introspection, and he had never misunderstood her.

"Should you say I had *enough* to give that I consider my own?" she said.

"You've a great deal to give, Octavia—more than you think."

"If, for instance, you heard I was going to be married, would you feel confident? . . . Would you feel happy?"

There was an appeal in Octavia's voice as she fixed her eyes upon him; he felt strangely moved.

"If marriage made me see less of you I would not be happy," he said, trying to escape.

"But suppose you saw me *just* as often, and I loved you just as much."

"That would always make me happy."

"No; but would you be *sure* I would be equal to giving all you say I've got?"

"Wouldn't it depend a little on whom you married?"

"Do you think I'm capable of loving the wrong man?"

"Yes; but p'raps not of marrying him."

"Would you be *sure* of that?"

"Yes, Octavia; I feel quite sure you'll never marry the wrong man; but the righter he is, the more difficult you'll find it. And if it wasn't difficult you wouldn't love him."



## ENGAGED

"You've guessed, have you?"

"Yes, I've guessed. You're going to marry Greville Pelham."

During the ride home Octavia thought of what the Professor had said. She liked to think that, when the time came, her best friend believed she would be capable of something bigger than herself. She looked at the stars, and when she arrived at Dunross she felt relieved and happy. She had made up her mind to tell her secret.

When Octavia announced her engagement, the family and household were overwhelmed with delight; and plans, presents, and congratulations kept her in a deceptive state of excitement. Everyone was against a long engagement; and though Greville forbore to influence her decision he was relieved when she wrote and told him she would marry early in the New Year.

Having to settle his affairs had taken Greville abroad, and his introduction to the Daventry family had been delayed. It was several weeks after the engagement before he was free to go to Scotland.

When he arrived at Dunross he observed that Octavia not only dominated the entire household, but was in a curious state of mind. After a day or two, some of her gaiety returned, and it was only on the few occasions they were alone that he found her quiet and restrained. Unaccustomed to this humour, he thought her more irresistible than he had ever seen her.

His one desire was to erase from Octavia's mind the fear that—in spite of her gaiety in company—he felt was pursuing her: that marriage meant the end of youth, adventure, and all that she cared for.

He had purposely planned, not only that his visit should be short, but that he should fall into the ways of the house, so that the woman he loved should not feel any sense of responsibility about her engagement. Half guessing, and yet uncertain of what was passing in her mind, he felt a great

tenderness towards her, and as the days slipped away he yearned to be alone with her.

He put off announcing his departure as long as he could. One evening finding her alone, he told her he would have to go to London the next day.

Seeing the look of surprise on her face, he said :

"I shall be writing here late to-night ; I've got a heap of letters to answer. Will you come and talk to me ?"

Octavia, who was aware that she had been crowding every moment of her days with occupations that were not necessary, felt an unreasoning irritation at being taken by surprise.

"I thought sons-in-law paid much longer visits. Must you go ?"

"I'm afraid I must," he replied.

"You might have told me before, I think !"

"But, darling, when could I have told you ?—You're all so busy here, my movements seemed quite irrelevant. I haven't had much chance of talking to you, have I ?"

"Are you really going when we've got such a short time to be together before we're married ?"

"Yes ; I'm going," he said, walking to the writing-table.

Not liking the tone of his voice, she said :

"You're cross with me, Greville."

"I say, Octavia, will you play fives with us ? Jack and Peggy have come back with me ; they're going to dine and I'll motor them home," said Bill, bursting into the boudoir.

"No, I'm far too busy. I'll do something with you all after dinner. Shut the door !"

Left alone together, Octavia went up to Greville.

"Won't you talk to me *now* ?" she said, looking at him with the expression of a guilty child upon her face.

"Yes, if you promise you'll come and see me to-night," he replied without looking at her.

"I see you want to leave us. You're not enjoying yourself here."



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He remained standing at the writing-table.

"Confess you loved me more before we were engaged. I knew it would be like this. I've always said engagements make everything impossible."

"I thought it was marriage you thought so impossible," he said.

"Oh, Greville, you know quite well what I mean!—There's a sort of ecstasy about untrammelled love; being caught and tamed robs life of all its adventure. Look at the couples we know. Most of them are pickled by marriage.—Society would cease to exist if you had to ask husbands and wives out together!—My heart sinks when I see the expression on a wife's face when her husband has told a good story; or the expression of a man when his wife is making an effort to be entertaining."

He did not answer.

"Why do you want to leave me when you've only just come?"

"I've been here ten days, and I would rather see you when you're less occupied," he said, turning on the light of the lamp on the table.

"You didn't expect me to have nothing to do at a time like this, did you, Greville?"

"No, I didn't; that's why I'd rather come back later," he said, arranging the blotting-paper.

"Why don't you confess that what I said was true? You loved me a hundred times better before we were engaged."

He turned and looked at her standing in his Chinese dressing-gown; but he was immovably resolved not to give way; he knew if he did, she would cajole him from his intention.

"I don't think you mean what you're saying. Ever since I've been here you've never talked to me; and hardly allowed me to be alone with you. I would have been wiser to have left the first day, when you slipped away and said good night as if I had been a tourist. God forbid that my

love should come between you and what you want to do, and to say, and to think ! ”

“ You forget how tired I was that night. Talking about plans kills me ; and what *does* it matter when you’re going to be married !—everything settles itself automatically,” she said petulantly.

“ I wasn’t talking about plans, darling,” he answered gently, “ I was listening.”

“ I don’t think you were. You appeared to me to be miles away ; buried in your own thoughts.”

“ I was looking at you.”

After a pause she said :

“ Why do you stand over there as if you were in a shop ?—You’re vexed with me ; somehow or other I’ve disappointed you, I’m not what you thought I’d be.”

“ Let’s sit on the sofa then, and you shall tell me everything that’s in your heart ; all the things I hoped you would have told me when I came here. Listen, Octavia : if you don’t like being engaged, and dread being married, how am I to know you love me ? ”

He sat down, but she did not move.

“ Sweet, sweet heart,” he said, stretching his arms out to her with infinite yearning, “ let’s pretend we’re *not* going to be married ; that we hardly know one another, and that you’re wild and free. Come and tell me what it is that you dread.”

She sat down upon his knees and wound her arms round his neck ; but he did not kiss her.

“ Will you promise not to mind, and not to make love, but just to listen ? ” she said.

“ I promise not to mind, and not to make love. Now tell me.”

“ Well, you see, though I *ought* to be enjoying every minute of the day and night, I’m *not*. I’m always thinking of what it will be when we’re married, and wondering if a husband can ever be a lover : . . . I mean love one wildly



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without thinking of what's going to happen next. I've been trying to treat you like a husband."

"Have you, darling? I haven't observed it," he said.

"I mean what you've just said: I haven't tried to be alone with you—I've just taken everything for granted." Putting her arms tighter round him, she said: "I've tried to prevent you loving me . . . I wanted to forget . . ."

He interrupted her:

"Never mind about that now; but go on telling me why you think it will all be so different when we're married."

Lowering her head and in an earnest voice, she said:

"I'll tell you. How am I to know when we're married if you're loving me because you want to or because you *must*. Fondling will be a duty and kissing a habit, and there'll be nothing to hide and nothing to discover. Spontaneity that's repeated ceases to be spontaneous, and you'll have the first claim on all I'm thinking and all I'm feeling. If either of us are tired *now*, and have nothing in particular to say, we can slip away and be alone; and the moment we're apart long to be together again."

"But, beloved, how can a date make any difference to our love? Everything will be just the same. I shall long to be alone with you when we're married even more than I do now. If you only knew *how much more*!" he said, with passion.

"But I shan't be away from you!—I shall belong to you like the furniture. I shall be fixed like the mangle."

"Oh, Octavia, how can you say such a thing? . . . Why should I claim you when I can love you? When you *really* let me love you, *you will claim me*!"

"You think that now!—but you'll find it'll all be quite different; and you *will* claim me. You'll think I'm cross when I'm tired, and dull when I don't talk. You'll tell me what you're going to do, and what you want to eat. When I laugh, you may not be in the humour to be amused; and when you love, I may not be in the mood to be kissed. You

won't *mean* to do all this, but you won't be able to avoid it. I shall be always there—there for you to claim ! ” she said, moved by the eloquent picture she was drawing of her future.

Greville listened without moving. His arm was round her at the same angle as it had been when she placed herself upon his knees. He unclasped her hands which were round his neck, and holding them in both his, he said :

“ Listen, Octavia. Would it make a difference to you if I were to promise here and now, that whatever happens in the future I will never, *never* claim you ? ”

“ All the difference in the world ! ” she said, putting her face against his.

“ Then, beloved of my heart, I swear upon your little head that I will never, *never* claim you. Do you believe me ?—Look up, and say you believe me, or I shall . . . ”

The door opened, and Mrs. Daventry came in : “ I’ve just had a telegram, Octavia, from the Professor. He has returned, and wants to know which day he can come here. Did you settle which of the monograms you want on your dressing-case ? And have you thanked Lord Tilbury for the diamond fox, and the poor woman for the horseshoe ? ”

Octavia got up, and telling her mother that Greville wanted to be alone, they walked out of the room together.

When the door was shut, Greville sat long and motionless. He felt like a beaten man. It was evident to him that he was in love with a woman who was not in love with him. His way of looking at things, and his music, had interested her, and his conversation—sufficiently different to what she heard in hunting circles—had made her take a sudden fancy to him. But in the atmosphere by which she was surrounded, the wild country, and a household that she dominated, he was a barrier and restriction. Something had made her unhappy in London. Possibly Jessica or someone had shocked her, and she had taken refuge in her prayers ; just as she had sought his society when Robin’s attentions had



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become excessive. He had been able to console her for the moment, but he had done it by exciting her emotions, not by winning her love.

He remembered with bitterness how it had been the same all through life with him. Whenever he had been fond of a woman, her interest had flagged, or her affection cooled. He seemed incapable of inspiring sustained devotion.

The liaison he had made in Paris which had caused his mother infinite anxiety had been an object-lesson in this connection.

Something about him—either his face, his voice, or his manner of making love—had attracted a cocotte, and almost against his inclination and contrary to his reason he had become her lover. He was conscious in a very short time that what she felt for him was not love but curiosity. After a few months of fatiguing self-indulgence, in a moment of despair he suggested that they should marry, and he could still remember the laughter with which his suggestion had been met, and the relief and humiliation he had felt at the affair being terminated.

There were other incidents in his life that accumulated the evidence against his power of domination. It was clear to him that he was born with some non-conducting clay in his nature that stood between him and a woman's love. The only evidence he had to the contrary was Octavia's behaviour in London when they had become engaged; but the sudden impulse of so young a creature in a mood of dejection was evidence that was not reliable. And what did she know about love or life? She had read enough to make one imagine she knew something. But some girls had no curiosity. Their minds were like stomachs—they only digested what interested them; the rest went into waste.

Staring into the fire, he thought of the promise he had made that he would never claim her. A dangerous promise to make to the woman you were in love with!—The responsibility of marrying someone capable of such inexplicable

changes of temperature filled him with despair. It would be terrifying if in a revulsion of feeling Octavia were to take a physical dislike to him, and darken the nights of their honeymoon by resisting his caresses. How was he to know?

Greville hid his face in his hands. Rather than cripple his passion and wreck their lives, he ought to face the truth: Octavia was not in love with him, and the right thing for him to do was to release her from her promise and go out of her life.

His reflections were put to an abrupt end by the butler opening the door and saying dinner was served.

He had lost all sense of time and place, and the only thing he was sure of was that he could not face a family party at dinner.

He went into the drawing-room, and with many apologies asked Mrs. Daventry if she would excuse him from dining, explaining as well as he could how he had neglected his correspondence and that there were letters he must write to his lawyer, etc.

Had his host been at home good manners would have made him join them, but as he had spent most of the day with the family and was going to see Octavia before she went to bed, he felt nothing but relief, when Mrs. Daventry—who liked him best when she was away from him—said she quite understood, and that soup and champagne would be sent into the boudoir.

Fearing his conduct looked as if they had had a quarrel, he went up to Octavia, who was standing near her mother:

“When you have finished your games you will come into the library and say good night to me?” he said.

Octavia had put on a new dress, and, gnawed by remorse, had made up her mind she would be gay, and charming, and remove any suspicion he might have that she did not love him.

Alarmed by the intensity of Greville’s expression, she looked at him and blushed.



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Mrs. Daventry perceived that there was something in the situation that she did not understand. She had never seen Octavia blush before.

"Can't you prolong your visit?" she said. "I'm sure if my husband were here he would urge you to stay."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Daventry, but I have engagements in London that make it impossible," he replied.

"People have said that before at Dunross!" said Bill. "But I notice Octavia generally makes them change their minds."

Greville smiled.

"I expect you're right, Bill," he said.

Buoyed up by this remark, Octavia determined she would use all her influence to reverse his decision.

Throughout the dinner she was haunted by the conversation she had had with Greville. Had she foreseen that he was going away it might have been different; and she passionately regretted the time wasted. She knew it was not true when she told him she was tired on the night of his arrival. For reasons she could not have explained she had determined she would show her lover she was unfettered, and not allow him to suppose that an engagement gave him any right over her.

Confident in her powers of persuasion, when the games were over she went to the library.

"How I wish you had been with us to-night! we had the greatest fun!" she said. "I've brought my poem to show you. We played Styles—imitating authors either in verse or prose and guessing who they're meant to be. Of course, this is very easy to guess. Read it." She put her elbow on the mantelpiece and watched him while he read her poem:

*The Lord thou wilt, and He doth shall  
His chosen and His own:  
In pleasant paths them up He holds  
Nor down to fall makes prone.*

*His hand against in anger moves  
Those necks in pride held stiff,  
Nor those He loves and trusts, need they  
Fear doing well then if.*

*Who will rise up for me against  
Th' ungodly like a worm,  
Who creeps until the pit be digged  
For him once to return?"*

"I think it's excellent," he said absently. "I suppose you sing Psalms like this every Sunday."

"We always go to Church, but it's very empty. We're told God is among us when two or three are gathered together: it's just as well, as if He expected more He would not come at all! Do you go to Church?"

"I love St. Paul's Cathedral, but I daresay I wouldn't go if I didn't play the organ."

"I've got a new dress on: d'you like it? I got it because you said you liked the one I wore at St. Mildred's."

He fingered the fringes of her sash and told her he liked it. After a long pause she went nearer.

"Greville, I want to ask you something," she said. "Will you promise me something?"

"I don't think I can make any more promises. They frighten me," he answered gravely.

"Oh! it's not that kind of promise," she said, looking down. "It's quite different. It's only a little thing. Wouldn't you like to do something that would please me tremendously?"

"You know I would."

"Then," she said, in her most caressing manner, "say you promise."

"I won't make any more promises, darling. Tell me what it is."

"I want you to stay on. I don't want you to go to-morrow."



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With a note of impatience in his voice, Greville said :

"I can't do that, Octavia. You mustn't ask me."

"Now I know I've disappointed you," she said with passion. "If you can leave me so soon, I shall never believe you love me."

He made a movement as if to touch her and then turned away. She flung herself full length upon the sofa.

"Sweet, sweet heart," he said, sitting down beside her. "Don't you know the only thing I want in the whole world is that you should let me love you?"

"Why do you leave me, then?" she said.

"Look at me, darling," he whispered, leaning over her.

"No, no! You don't love me, or you wouldn't leave me," she said, on the verge of tears.

He did not answer. The room seemed to be slowly turning. Neither of them spoke. Again he bent over her.

"You know I would give my life to save you from anything that might harm you. But you won't let me. What can I do?"

He sat up as if to go; she turned her face and looked at him. Devouring her with the fervour of his eyes, he said :

"Ah, Octavia! if my love frightens you, for God's sake say so—say it *now*, before it's too late."

Octavia raised herself, and stretching her arms out to him, said :

"If you will only be patient, and trust me, beloved—it never, *never* will."

Moved by the fine intensity of her expression he put her gently back upon the cushions. He noted her little flushed face, and the disarrayed draperies round her half-clad figure. Speechless with emotion, he pressed his hands slowly over her from her knees to her breasts.

"Come to me," he murmured. "Give me your lips and say I may love you."

He gathered her close and resistless in his arms. Their lips met.

She lay long and still in his embrace.

Afraid of exhausting her he sat up, then whispered a sentence in her ear. Warm and shy, she looked at him with round eyes.

"Answer! Answer!" he said.

She tried to hide her face, but he would not let her.

"Why do you want me to speak?" she said, lowering her eyes.

"I shall be haunted when I leave you to think you haven't told me. Whisper your answer to me, my little love."

"But you know all about it, darling," she said, in a voice that was hardly audible.

"No, I don't! I only know what *I* felt."

"But weren't we feeling the same?" she murmured.

"My God! How happy you make me! Let me carry you to bed, my sweet bride, as I did when we first met, and you shall say it all over again."

"No, no! I must go now! It's not good for you to be loved so much," she said; and disentangling herself from his arms she left the room.

Greville's success in rousing Octavia's physical emotions had given him a momentary feeling of exquisite confidence, but when he was alone in his bedroom all his apprehensions returned; he felt numb. He knew that had he wanted to possess her his methods of fondling were gentle enough to have broken down her resistance almost without her being conscious of it; but that knowledge gave him no pleasure. It was her love, not her body that he wanted; and he reflected on the irony that a being so unaware of the meaning of passion should only want his kisses.

Remembering the look of wonder in her eyes, and still feeling the magic of her body, he flung himself upon his bed.

Haunted by the promise he had given, Greville fell into a hot sleep and dreamt that she was watching him drowning.



## CHAPTER XIX

### *THE HONEYMOON*

IT had been arranged that Greville and Octavia should be married in London from a house that the Daventrys had taken in Portman Square. Owing to pressing and unexpected claims upon Greville's time, the honeymoon could be little more than a fortnight, and was to be spent in the South of France in a villa between Cannes and Antibes.

Sir Harry consoled his nephew for the shortness of the honeymoon.

"Believe me, my dear boy, women like their husbands to be occupied," he said; "you won't find a fortnight too short in a place where there's nothing to do but climb rocks and sit in a hard boat. I hate the sea myself; but if Octavia likes it . . ."

"I don't think she does. It's her mother's choice. All the partings, and presents, and clothes and things are getting on Octavia's nerves: we're thankful to have it settled for us," was his reply.

Greville was right when he said the wedding arrangements were on Octavia's nerves. She was worn out with the new friends and old relations that filled the house; and not a little tired of the advice that was given to her.

Seeing how overwrought she was, Greville did not attempt to see her too often alone. He was more anxious that she should be with his mother than with anyone else, and noticed with delight the impression they had made upon one another.

Mrs. Pelham was captivated by Octavia, and touched by her youth, and the affection she showed her. Living as she always had, for, and with her son, she had not realized till she met Octavia that Greville had had no youth. That he would have to get younger and Octavia older to make their marriage a success hovered about her heart. She remembered with anxiety how in the early days of her own marriage her husband's abrupt and angry idealism had surprised her : and no one knew better than she did that it was thanks to her happy calm, and sense of proportion, that her married life had been a success. She was aware of the conflict between what was physical and possessive, and what was intellectual and noble, that was clouding Greville's heart, and longed to interpret his baffling nature to Octavia.

One afternoon three days before the wedding, Octavia went to see Mrs. Pelham. She found her stitching at her needlework.

Octavia threw her hat and cloak on a chair, and after hugging Mrs. Pelham stretched herself upon the sofa.

"I want you to tell me everything, beloved Mrs. Pelham ; and all you felt just before you were married," she said.

"I will tell you all I can, darling. I remember being doubtful about my power to make my husband happy, as he and I were of different ages and temperaments. I was much older than you are ; and I don't think either of us expected as much of life as you do."

"How old were you ?"

"I was thirteen years older than you."

"Shall I expect less of life when I'm thirty ?" asked Octavia.

"I don't believe you will, darling. I think the best way of not being disappointed is to expect a great deal of yourself and not too much from other people. This sounds sententious, but you will understand me," she answered.

Mrs. Pelham's remark reminded Octavia of her lover.

"Would Greville say that, d'you think ?"



## THE HONEYMOON

"No : I don't think he would. He has a very difficult temperament, and expects even more of life than you do. As a little boy he was so impatient that if he was kept waiting he was ill. So far, his emotions, whether from unpropitious circumstances or from something unhappy in his nature, have been voiceless and unsatisfied. You'll be able to do a great deal for him, Octavia. He lacks sense of proportion and rhythm. I think you need rhythm in life as in music. When Greville is upset I make him play to me : it calms him."

"You surely wouldn't say he was tempestuous, would you ?" asked Octavia with surprise.

"He has strange humours ; and he's passionate. He suffers a good deal from his temper, though I'm sure, darling, he'll never lose it with you."

"I don't think I should mind if he did. I like to see strong reactions ; Greville would lose a great deal of his charm for me if he was even. I'm ever so passionate myself."

"Are you, darling ? I shouldn't have said so," said Mrs. Pelham, putting down her needlework and sitting near Octavia.

"It's funny you should say that, because mama said to me the other night she didn't think I knew what passion meant. I had an instinct she was going to talk about the duties a wife owed to her husband, and this is the last thing any woman wants to hear when she's going to be married !"

"Does your mother talk much to you about intimate things ?" said Mrs. Pelham, taking Octavia's hand in hers.

"No, I can't say she does. You see, she and I are poles apart, though she's been most sweet to me. She asked me if I would like to have children, and I said of course I should ; I would like to have a nursery full of children !"

"What did your mother say ?"

"She began again all about duty, and sacrifice, till I implored her to stop. You think that was horrid of me, darling Mrs. Pelham, don't you ; but *you're* not going to talk to me

as if I was a sort of ballet girl or circus rider, are you!—You're not afraid Greville won't love me when we're married, are you?" she said, scrutinizing her companion's face.

"No, no, darling. My only fear would be he might love you too much."

At that moment the door opened. Greville came into the room; delighted at seeing Octavia with his mother, he asked them what they were talking about. Mrs. Pelham got up and kissed Octavia.

"I shall leave you now, darling; and don't overdo things. You must look, and feel lovely on your wedding day."

When she had shut the door Greville said:

"Tell me what you were talking about."

"There's no one like your mother!—I would tell her anything. I was asking her if she thought you'd love me when we were married."

"What did she say?"

"She said I should adore my husband, but she would not answer for what he might feel for me."

"Little liar!" he said, his eyes shining. "What did she *really* say?"

"We talked about you. She said you were restless and passionate."

"And what did you say?" said he, sitting down on the sofa beside her.

Octavia felt unaccountably happy, and wanted to prevent him being serious; so ignoring the fervour of his eyes she said as lightly as she could:

"Is there any reason why I should tell you?"

"Every reason," he replied, trying to speak in a similar vein.

She looked at his handsome, earnest face, and reflecting how little she had given him of herself during her engagement replied:

"I said I loved passionate people!"



## THE HONEYMOON

Greville felt a sudden grip at his heart, and half afraid of his own emotion said :

“ My sweet, sweet darling, and *do* you ? ”

She moved closer and putting her arms round his neck hid her face against him.

. . . . .  
After a crowded and exhausting wedding, Greville and Octavia travelled all night and arrived late in the afternoon at their destination. They were welcomed by Madame Jules and her husband in the villa that had been lent to them for their honeymoon.

Greville begged Octavia to rest, but she was too excited looking at everything to listen to him. She walked round the garden picking stocks and roses ; and finding a kitten under a mimosa tree ran round in a circle and played with it while he watched her from the veranda revelling in her youth and beauty. The kitten bounded into the bushes and she joined her husband. She took away his newspapers, and sitting on his knee discussed every detail of their wedding day. Relieved to see her gay and talkative, he listened to all she had to say.

When they had finished dinner they walked down to the sea. After strolling about for some time Greville suggested they should go in, as it was late, and she was tired.

“ It seems dull to go in on such a divine night ! ” she said, looking up at the stars. “ Let’s sit down over there.”

They sat and listened to the sea muttering under the rocks below them. The conversation flagged, and Octavia confessed she was dropping with fatigue. He put his arm round her and they walked silently back to the villa.

“ You won’t mind sleeping in your dressing-room, will you, darling ? I feel too exhausted to talk,” she said when they got into her bedroom.

“ But I shan’t want you to talk, sweetheart. I only want you to lie in my arms and let me put you to sleep,” he said.

“ No, no !—You’ve no idea what a bad sleeper I am. I’d

keep you awake all night, and then you'd feel cross in the morning. I should hate you to be upset on our honeymoon."

"Won't you let me try and put you to sleep? I've succeeded before, you remember."

"You're not thinking it's because I don't love you, are you, darling?" she said, seeing the intensity of his expression.

"I don't know what I was thinking," he replied abruptly.

"Stay and talk while I'm undressing, and if I wake up I'll go to your room," she said, kissing him on both cheeks.

He sat in a chair watching her. After unfastening the ribbons of her tea-gown she walked about the room in her chemise, brushing her hair.

"Did you enjoy our wedding, darling?" she said, pulling off her shoes and stockings.

"I expect it's more amusing for a woman. No one looks at a man on his wedding day."

"I'm not sure about that. Jessica says you have a really interesting face: most people's faces are so naked!—The only person I was sorry for was Dick."

"Yes; poor Dick!" said Greville.

"Do you like my trousseau?" she said, pulling her night-gown off the bed.

He did not answer. Going up to him she said:

"You're not cross with me, are you, darling, for being dog-tired?"

"Not at all, but I think I'll go now," he said, getting up.

"Kiss me then; and when I wake I'll come to your room," said Octavia, accompanying him to the door.

The next day they spent driving along the coast and wandering through the villages. As the evening approached Greville said to her:

"You never came to see me last night."

"I slept without turning and only rang my bell at ten o'clock. Did you mind?"



## THE HONEYMOON

"It was better for you to sleep," he said, "because you're not tired to-night, are you?"

"Not a bit. We might go out in a boat after dinner, or would that bore you?"

"How could I be bored with you near me, my sweet love? You shall do just what you like. It's your honeymoon, not mine."

Octavia did not like this. It had a jarring sound. Ignoring his remark, she said:

"I don't think I'd like the sea for long. I'm always glad it says in the Psalms there shall be no more sea. It would have been awful if they had said there shall be no more hills. Don't you long for the moors?"

"I don't think I care very much."

"I suppose it's because I'm Scotch that I hunger for the heather. Wouldn't it be delicious if papa would lend us Dunross all August and September? After that we'd go to Chivers. I shan't be able to hunt much because I've only got one horse, but that won't matter. Lots of people will mount me. How enchanted our hunting friends will be to see us! I shall sit on the right hand of all our hosts and you'll be ever so proud of me!—Isn't it the fashion to make a lot of a bride?"

"I believe it is. You like the idea of being a bride, do you?"

"But, of course!—So would you if you were a woman. I never enjoyed anything as much as our wedding day—except for the night journey. I didn't like that."

He did not answer. After a pause he said:

"Not being a woman, I don't suppose I understand; but a bride in public strikes me as an anomaly."

"What does anomaly mean exactly?"

"Well, something disjointed or out of order," he said.

"You surely wouldn't like an orderly bride, would you, darling? I can't imagine anything so dull!—If I were a

man, I should like something unexpected in the woman I married."

"I wonder if you would?" he said, with deliberation.

"But I thought that was what you liked about me!—You've often told me I was quite different from any woman you'd ever met. Do you think differently now?"

"My God, no!" he said abruptly.

Wondering what it was that made him look strange and unlike himself, she got up and said with a reproachful look:

"But, surely, darling, you don't want me to be like other women, do you?"

"You could never be that."

"And I should hate you to be like any other man," she said.

"I don't pretend to be original. I'm afraid there are a good many men like me in the world."

"It's lucky for you I never met them, isn't it?" she said, putting her head against his shoulder and playing with the lapel of his coat. He did not respond.

"Something has put you out, Greville. . . . Has anyone written anything that worries you?" she said, still playing with his coat.

"I haven't opened my letters, have you?"

"No; I've been disgracefully idle. It's difficult, I suppose, for anyone to settle down upon their honeymoon."

Neither of them spoke.

"Let's go and sit on the rocks where we went last night," she said.

Side by side they walked down the path past the cork trees and olives, with an orange sun setting in their faces.

The sea lay in a turquoise line, broken by frills of waves spilling themselves against the rocks. They sat looking in front of them till white stars peeped through the fading colour of the day.

Finding him quiet and unresponsive, Octavia took off her shoes and stockings and ran down to the shallow rocks;



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while Greville, clasping his knees with his hands, watched her moving further and further away from him. Buried in his thoughts he heard her call, and looking up he saw Octavia waving a long riband of seaweed. He waved back mechanically; then feeling the air suddenly cold, he got up and walked down to meet her.

They lingered on the beach, returning to the rose garden; and talked in a disjointed manner like people who have little to say. Breaking the silence at the same moment, she said:

"Go on. . . . What was it you were saying?"

"No, no. You go on. It wasn't anything particular I had to say," he replied.

While Octavia was dressing for a late dinner with her door ajar, she heard the French housekeeper say to her husband:

"Madame a l'air bien ennuyé: je parie que ses ressources sont entièrement dans le mouvement."

"Je trouve que monsieur a l'air bien malade," was the reply.

Octavia shut the door, and putting on her prettiest tea-gown went downstairs. At dinner she appeared to be under the dominion of some unusual influence. Full of small talk, she jumped about from subject to subject, hardly waiting for a reply.

They sat on the veranda after they had finished their coffee.

"Would you like me to sleep in my dressing-room to-night, darling?" he said.

"No; I don't mind. But you look white as a sheet. Do you feel ill? Those horrid lawyers, and fixing up the marriage settlements and things have worried you."

"No; it's not that," he said, moving his finger slowly backwards and forwards along the arm of his chair.

Octavia looked at him.

"I don't care what you say, but you're tired out! You know women are much tougher than men. What man could nurse an invalid night after night, even if he chose his

own invalid ? I really believe if it weren't for women there wouldn't be a nurse in the world."

He did not reply.

After a pause that seemed interminable she said :

"Let's go to bed. You look worn out."

"Come here, Octavia, and tell me if you're happy," he said. "I don't want to say or do anything that would make you sad. All I care for—all I dream of, is to see you happy. Come and talk to me."

"But I *am* happy, and I *do* love you !" she said : and flinging herself on to his knees she burst into tears.

Greville held her like a child in his arms, kissing her eyes and pushing the hair off her forehead. There was a long silence, during which neither of them moved. The sound of the sea was beating like a drum with punctual monotony.

At last he spoke in a low voice :

"My sweet, sweet darling ; you think I don't understand, but I do. You don't want to remind me of my promise, but I've not forgotten it." He paused. "The truth is we're both tired. I'll take you to your room and if you like we can talk ; or you can lie in my arms and not say a single word."

When they reached Octavia's bedroom he went in front of her and opened all the windows. He looked out at the night perforated with stars. He felt suffocated and chilly.

She allowed him to undress her while she watched him fumbling with her ribbons. When her petticoat had fallen on the floor she held her chemise up to her throat and jumped into bed. Greville stretched himself slowly on the coverlet beside her.

His thoughts travelled back to the night at Dunross—that wonderful night, when she lay so close that nothing but his love could have prevented him from possessing the whole of her. He recalled the whiteness of her throat, and the roundness and warmth of her body under the pressure of his fingers.



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He shut his eyes, and put his hand up to his forehead. Octavia started.

"You're ill!" she said, sitting up. "Oh, darling, I felt you tremble. You're cold. Get into bed."

"I don't think I will," he said. "I rather think I *am* ill."

"You're not!" she said, jumping out of bed and putting on her dressing-gown.

She placed another pillow under his head and looked at him with large and frightened eyes.

"I've made you ill," she said.

"No; no, you haven't; but all the same I think I'll go," he said, getting off the bed.

"Say you're not ill, beloved, or I shall be sleepless with misery. Shall I come with you?"

"Not to-night."

"If you want anything will you come to me, darling?"

"I wonder?" he said, in a dry voice as he opened the door of the adjoining room.

"Would you rather I went to you?" she said, looking at him anxiously.

He shook his head. "It's late. You must go to sleep."

"Leave the door open so that I can hear if you want anything," she said.

He went into his dressing-room and shut the door.

When Greville was in bed he longed to shut out every sound. He lay awake far into the night listening to the patter of the waves against the rocks. He had turned out every light except the lamp near his bed, and his temples burned with an angry emotion. "I shall keep my promise if it kills me," he said to himself, "and if I'm ill she shan't nurse me." After pulling the pillow so as to hide the light he fell into a hot sleep.

Hearing a fumbling at the door he woke. Octavia was standing by his bed.

"Can't I do anything for you, Greville?" she asked falteringly.

"No, no ; I'm all right. It's nothing but fatigue."

"But you weren't tired when we came here, were you ? "

"You'd better go back to bed—you'll get cold."

"Oughtn't I to send for the doctor ? "

"We don't know any."

"But I could wake Jenkins, and Jules . . ."

"We can do that later," he said. "All I really want is sleep."

"But, darling, if you're going to be ill . . ."

Remembering the expression of her eyes when he had said he thought he was ill, he looked at her searchingly in the half-light.

"That would be terrible, wouldn't it ? " he said slowly. Adding in a sharper tone, "You wouldn't like anything unpleasant like illness on our honeymoon, would you ? That wouldn't suit you at all."

"Oh, darling, darling, how can you say such a thing !—I'd nurse you through yellow fever," she said, falling on her knees by the bed.

"I shouldn't like that at all. I've only been ill once and I didn't even let my mother nurse me. I preferred being alone. It's p'raps wrong of me, but if you're not revolted by illness *I* am. I want nothing but mechanical professionalism, and a stranger beside me."

For a moment she stared at him speechless, then withdrew her gaze from the coldness of his eyes. She got up and walked to the door.

"Won't you let me kiss you, Greville ? "

"Better not. I might have something infectious. I honestly believe I've got influenza. The sudden wind made me feel chilly. You might shut the windows."

She shut the double glass windows one by one, and when she turned round his eyes were closed. For some time she stood without moving ; then thinking he was asleep walked on tip-toe to her bedroom, closing the door noiselessly behind her.



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Octavia threw herself upon her bed, and though she would not have confessed it, her chief sensation was one of indignation. What sort of man was the man she had given up everything for—the man who was to lure her away from herself? Was he always to have his own way? Was she to surrender all through life at his bidding? When had he ever given up his will? Even at Dunross he had left the day he said he would. It was only when she had been miserable in St. Paul's Cathedral that she had felt his strength and his tenderness. What she liked about Robin was he understood happiness, and unevenness of moods and humours. Why should Greville be so inelastic? Why surprised that she should like being made much of? "A public bride" . . . "*Your* honeymoon, not mine." Just because she had been too exhausted to go to his bedroom after a night journey. Was he really ill? She remembered Mrs. Pelham telling her of Greville's temper, and how he had been physically ill when kept waiting. Why should he expect patience of others when he had so little himself?

Had Octavia been convinced that Greville was ill, her action would have been defined and her mind clear. But was it illness? She was haunted by the passionless tone of his voice when he told her to leave him. It was humiliating to think she had not really won his love, but had only succeeded in rousing his emotions. That was what everyone had warned her against. She was always told that emotions were fleeting things and dangerous to depend on: even the Professor had said you must marry in spite of being in love, never because of it. What had Greville married her for if he was not in love?

Perhaps he was really ill. Why should he think illness revolted her? What a cruel thing to think!—and to say he liked professional nurses!—a race of hard, bright, efficient women. Was he ill? Was he asleep? She remembered she had felt him tremble when he lay down beside her.

She sat up and listened. No sound of any kind broke the

silence. The sky was getting light. She might wake him if she went into his room, and another repulse was more than she could have endured.

She lay back and fixed her unclosed eyes on the armoire à glace and Venetian blinds of her colourless bedroom. The tepid sun was making quivering patterns through the lace curtains on the ceiling. She listened to the crack of whips and clang of early bells, as clocks shrill and sudden ushered in the dawn.

Hearing a tap on the wall, she jumped up and opened the dressing-room door. The lamp by the bed was a yellow disk in the lavender light and the room felt cold and airless.

Making a sign to her not to come too near, Greville said: "I believe I've caught something or other. Wake the servants, will you, and send Jules for a doctor."

She stood without answering.

"May I come back and sit with you, darling?" she said, alarmed at the pallor of his face.

"We'll see what the doctor says; you had better go and dress," he replied, without looking at her. Noticing his eyes were shut she left the room.

Greville lay with his head thrown back, his body hot, and his senses numbed.

He felt that everything that had happened fitted in with what he had foreseen, and gnashed his thoughts with a bitter resentment against himself for not having obeyed his first instinct. If he had left Octavia when he suspected she was not in love with him, there would have been time to reconsider the whole situation. Jessica's words came back to him—words that had often haunted him: "Take care when you meet something bold and young that you don't kill their radiance or miss their meaning."

When had he ever missed her meaning? . . . Had his infatuation been too sudden, his embraces too impetuous? What was it that had dimmed her radiance and detached her love? To rouse her emotion was nothing: *that* would



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never compel her interest or ensure her love ; and if *he* could not do that, presumably someone else would—then life would be at an end for him.

Of one thing he was resolutely determined. He would keep his promise : he would never go to her as a suppliant. She must come to him ; and all that mattered now was that they should separate.

He roused himself and, taking a piece of paper, wrote a telegram to Joe, who had arrived at San Remo, saying he had got influenza ; and as he did not wish Octavia to catch it, he suggested she should go to him for a week.

The doctor came into the room. He did not speak a word of English, and after examining his patient, said he had “ *la fièvre* ” ; and, prompted by Greville, recommended a woman from the Convalescent Home to nurse him. After a little halting conversation the doctor took the telegram and said good-bye.

Octavia, who had been waiting in the passage, caught at the doctor's hand as he shut the door of Greville's bedroom and asked him if it was anything serious. He reassured her, saying all the patient needed was rest, and after telling her he was sending a nurse he left the house.

She put on her dress and went on to the veranda.

So she was not to nurse him, and everything was settled. Of what use was she ? She could not do, or undo, anything. She was a mere spectator—part of the furniture of the house. Hating the sight of the sun and the blue of the sky, she went into the sitting-room and sat down. Everything seemed to be at a standstill, and silence like the sea stretched in front of her. Why had she made him promise not to claim her ? What could she do to make him forget what she had said ? Robin had said : “ Once words were spoken, they could not be unsaid : they were never forgotten, but always repeated.” Was Greville always repeating his promise ? She, at any rate, would never ask him to break it—anything rather than go to him as a suppliant.

The nurse arrived and, explaining that there was a good deal of influenza in the neighbourhood, said she would take her patient's temperature.

Octavia sat back in her chair motionless, her mind idle, her heart hushed. She longed to go away—right away to some place where she should be wanted; to some person who would heal her.

Jenkins came in with two telegrams:

*Octavia must not catch influenza. Send her here at once. Love to both.*

*Joe (Hotel Beau Rivage).*

Opening the second she read:

*Beaten by largely reduced majority. Kind regards to your wife.*

*Waterborough.*

Octavia got up and went into Greville's bedroom. She handed him the telegrams.

"It was very thoughtful of you to wire to Joe so promptly," she said in a hard voice.

"It was just as well, as I have a high temperature," said Greville, lying for the first time in his life.

"Waterborough has been beaten," she said.

"God! beaten by that insignificant Tory, whose name wasn't even mentioned when we were down there!—I was afraid it would be like that. The election should have taken place at once instead of being postponed. Waterborough's far too good for Harbington."

"Tell me, Greville, do you wish me to come back?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, am I to join you in London or come back here?" she said.

"I'll let you know."

"Then you'll write to me, will you?"

"I don't understand you; of course I'll write."



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"I only wanted to know. You may not be allowed to write."

"I shall do exactly what I like."

"I expect you will," she said.

There was a pause. Walking slowly to the door, she said in the same hard voice :

"I'll go and tell Jenkins to pack. I won't kiss you ; I might catch something, then I'd have to stay. Good-bye. I'll call nurse."

Before Greville could say a word she had left the room.

## CHAPTER XX

### *THE HUNT BALL*

GREVILLE PELHAM'S indisposition had not been altogether imaginary. He cared too much for what he loved to be master of himself, and having little sense of proportion, he had worked himself up to a condition that was not normal. When Octavia left him, he was convinced that nothing but disaster stared him in the face.

Sleepless and without appetite, he determined he would go to London. Beyond a short letter announcing her arrival, he had not heard from Octavia, and he did not feel in the humour to write. After a week of restless misery he sent her a telegram :

*Recalled to England on important business. Doctor says am better—will write from London.—Love, G.*

He had been several days in London before his friends knew of his arrival ; and as it had always been understood that the honeymoon was to be short, no one was surprised to hear that Greville had returned alone.

One morning Sir Harry walked into the room.

“ Well, my dear boy, I hope you're better : you were quite right to come back. Being ill on one's honeymoon makes one miserable. When's Octavia returning ? We've arranged a great welcome for you both. The Harbington hunt ball is next week, and the Brabazons are giving a dinner. They want you to stay with them.”



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"That's a capital idea!" said Greville with forced animation. "Let's send a wire to Octavia."

"We can't have the ball without you both," said Sir Harry.

Greville sat down and wrote the telegram:

*You must come back for Harbington hunt ball next week. All want you. Love. Writing.—Greville Harry Pelham.*

"Will that do, uncle?"

"Perfectly, my dear boy. Well, I suppose you must be getting to your work. You don't look too well; I expect that cursed influenza pulled you down. If there's anything I can do, send me a line."

After his uncle left, Greville sat down and wrote to Octavia. Dissatisfied, he got up and threw his letter into the fire. He sat down again and wrote:

*Dear Darling,*

*I've been very bad about writing, but felt too wretched to concentrate on anything. It was just as well you left, as for both of us to have been ill would have been madness. (Do you remember saying one's dearest friends are embarrassed in a sick-room, not knowing when to come in, or how to get out?) Uncle Harry is keen you should come back for the Harbington ball next Thursday, so we sent you a wire. It will be nice to see our old hunting friends again. Don't be vexed with me; when we meet I'll explain. I think you'll like this house; my Mother left it perfect for us and it's comfortable. Off to work. Love. Greville.*

On reading the letter over he did not think it possible to have written a drabber composition. What was he going to explain when they met? "Nice to see friends"—"a comfortable house"! He was going to tear it up when the parlourmaid came in.

"If you please, sir, there's a telephone message asking if you can see Mr. Saunderson. They're waiting on the line."

"Say I've started," said Greville, and licking the envelope, he threw it down on the top of his letters and left the house.

All that day he talked to the people he had to see, and listened to what they had to say with lifeless inattention.

Devoured with impatience, he tore open the telegram at the top of his letters when he got home :

*Will be with you Wednesday next and go to Harbington ball.*  
Octavia.

The days that succeeded were passed with monotonous regularity, and he heard no more from the Riviera.

On Wednesday evening he went to Victoria Station. Arriving too early, he paced restlessly up and down the platform. The crowd was so great that when the train came in he was unable to distinguish anybody. Stumbling among the packages and porters, he suddenly felt a hand on his arm, and turning, he saw Octavia. He was as startled as if he had been there to meet some other person. She gave him a cool and ready kiss, and after instructing Jenkins they got into a taxi.

"I expect you're worn out," said Greville.

"I am rather. There's nothing so monotonous as the brightness of the Riviera ! Not a bird or a rabbit—and even on the sea you never see a gull or a ship. How are you ? Did you bring your nurse back ? "

"No ; she was an insupportable woman ! I was reminded of what Mephistopheles said of the nurse : ' I don't know what she will do when she dies, for I won't have her.' "

"Tell me, are we going to St. Mildred's to-morrow for the hunt ball—won't that bore you ? "

Greville longed to say something gay or interesting : anything to make her think he was in a good humour ; but could think of nothing.

"Not a bit. They're all keen to see us ; you'll go out hunting and see your friends. You'll like that, won't you ? "

Octavia was not sure of what was passing in his mind,



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but afraid of breaking the surface of the conversation, she said :

"I shall enjoy myself because I love hunting and dancing, but I don't want *you* to be bored," and added quickly : "Tell me, have my dresses come ?"

"I expect they have ; but I've been so infernally busy that I'm afraid I never asked."

When they arrived at Mrs. Pelham's house the maid informed them that Sir Harry was dining. Octavia wondered if Greville had asked him, and was half relieved and half disappointed when he exclaimed it was nice of his uncle to have invited himself.

At dinner the conversation was about hunting, in which Greville took little part. He watched his wife and tried to listen.

"You don't seem any the worse for your journey, my dear," said Sir Harry, delighted at Octavia's animation. "I was afraid you'd be tired. You must look your best to-morrow night. Hounds meet at Stanton Starkey Saturday ; the place they met the first day you hunted : I shall never forget the gate you jumped into the road ! You'll ride Kilmallock. It was a good idea of yours letting Miss Dawkins ride him. She's taken the greatest care of him. I think he's the best horse I ever saw."

"Who bought Havoc, Uncle Harry ?" said Octavia.

"Compton kept him, and has been going marvellously on him."

"Will Robin be at Harbington ?" she asked.

"I don't know—he's been hunting in Ireland. Jarvis, Smithson and Tilbury want to mount you, so if Greville agrees, you must come to Chivers and I'll look after you."

"Octavia shall do exactly what she likes," said Greville.

"I'm sure you'll be glad to hear that, dearest uncle !" said Octavia. "You see we've started well, and are a very independent couple."

"An excellent arrangement, my dear. Married couples

that are tied up too tight are not amusing for other people. Greville has had his way far too long," said Sir Harry, smiling benevolently and lighting a large cigar.

"You remind me of Miss Fowler, who wrote, 'Father always let us have his own way,'" said Octavia.

"Do you know many tightly-tied couples?" asked Greville. "I can't think of any—and the loose ones I've met don't seem to be very amusing."

"There are not many entertaining people in the world. One can only hope they amuse themselves in their own way or their lives would be insupportable," said Octavia, pushing her chair back from the table.

After a little conversation about the train they were to travel by the next day, Sir Harry left.

The parlour-maid brought in a salver with letters for Octavia, and Greville observed her tuck one into the sash of her dressing-gown.

"Anything interesting?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied, walking to the mantelpiece and arranging her hair in the looking-glass.

"You had better go to bed, hadn't you? You look exhausted," he said, opening the door of the sitting-room.

"Ah!—there are my dresses!" said Octavia, seeing a packing-case in the passage. "Jenkins!—Jenkins!!"

"I'll leave you now," said Greville. "I've got to see a man at Brooks's, and as I shall be late I'd better say good night."

Octavia was amazed that he should have made an appointment on the day of her arrival and felt a momentary impulse to say something; but being uncertain of what to say, she let the moment pass. Jenkins came down the passage.

"You'd better unpack those dresses or they'll be crushed to rags," said Octavia, standing in the doorway of her bedroom and pointing to the packing-case.

Side by side, they watched the maid cutting and unknotting tapes. Irritated by the sound of tissue-paper, Greville took his coat off a table in the passage. When he had put it



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on, Octavia was bending over the box, gazing at a mass of mauve and rose tulle and bunches of Parma violets.

"Isn't the velvet one there?" she exclaimed, kneeling down. "You'll hardly believe it, but I've never had a ball-dress!"

"I must go!" said Greville abruptly.

"Ah! there it is. Which night ought I to wear my best dress, d'you think?" she said musingly.

"You've dropped your letter," said Greville, stooping down. Octavia's colour rose as he handed her the letter. He kissed the corner of her ear and walked down the corridor. Watching, without seeing her ball-dresses being laid out upon the sofa, Octavia heard the front door open and shut.

. . . . .  
The inhabitants of Harbington and Dashington were all agog over the ball, and a special interest was given to the occasion by the promised presence of the newly-married couple.

Mrs. Malet and Lord Tilbury had accepted the Brabazons' invitation to stay at St. Mildred's, and Jessica was debating if they should ask Robin Compton, when she received a note from Jack Cuthbert saying he would be delighted to come, and suggesting he should bring Robin.

"Capital!" said Colonel Brabazon. "I thought Robin was in Ireland."

"D'you think we ought to have him, Brab?"

"Why not?" he asked. "I thought Octavia liked him!" Seeing a look come over his wife's face with which he was familiar, he added, "You don't mean to insinuate Pelham would be jealous of Robin, do you? Octavia is a child—I wouldn't even say she was a flirt."

"Really, Brab, you're amazing!"

"You're always seeing things that don't exist in people. I may be stupid, but I'm pretty sure that a man like Pelham would never stand any nonsense."

"Human nature with you, my dear, is an almost negligible

element. You think Greville's exalted pursuit of morality is infectious, and that Octavia's attractions will disappear now she's married, do you?"

"I don't understand you. You mean Robin may fall in love with her? Good heavens! he's surely had enough of that kind of thing!"

Jessica shrugged her shoulders and said:

"You may be right; but you'll find Octavia will get suddenly much older—no one could avoid it being married to Greville. I've always thought he'd be an exacting husband."

"Some women prefer that," said the Colonel.

"Do they, darling?" she said with evasive amiability.

"I can only say I've never met them. Anyway, I'll tell Jack Cuthbert he can bring Robin."

The matter being settled, no more was said about it.

On the night of the hunt ball St. Mildred's was full of lights and flowers, and, having gone into every arrangement, the Brabazons awaited the arrival of their guests.

When the Pelhams and Sir Harry were announced they were greeted with warmth, and after tea Jessica took Octavia up to her bedroom.

"I've put Greville in the room opposite you: the dressing-room's too small for his books and things. Susan is there, but she leaves us to-morrow night."

"It is sweet of you to give me my old room!" said Octavia, throwing her cloak and boa on a chair.

"How lovely your dresses are, darling," said Jessica, looking at the ball-dresses laid out on the bed. "You must wear the black velvet to-night, as the Harbington Town Hall would spoil the freshness of your tulle; mauve and rose will look divine at my dinner-party to-morrow. Will Greville go to-night?"

"I wonder," said Octavia. "He doesn't dance, as you know, so I don't think he'll enjoy it much. I adore dancing—I don't care what sort of man it is as long as he can dance!"



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"I only know one man who dances really well, and that's Robin."

"Is he coming?" said Octavia, fingering her ball-dresses.

"He's joining us at Harbington; he and Jack Cuthbert come back here after the ball. Now you must hop into bed; we don't dine till nine, so you can have a good sleep. Tell me, darling, are you quite happy about Greville?"

"What do you mean?" said Octavia abruptly.

"We heard he'd been ill, and I don't think he looks well, do you?"

"I think he looks dreadfully ill—but he never looked robust, did he?"

"I was only wondering if he ought to go to the ball to-night. The effects of influenza last longer than people think; but he may feel better after dinner."

"There's one thing quite certain," said Octavia; "if he doesn't want to go, neither you or I will alter his decision. Tell him not to disturb me, will you, darling? I'm going to sleep."

Jessica noted the dryness of Octavia's voice and pondered over it as she left the room.

Waking some time after the gong had sounded for dressing, Octavia called across the passage to Greville:

"Go down to dinner without me, will you, and say I won't be a minute."

When Greville joined the animated company in the drawing-room the sense of isolation that had always oppressed him in the hunting world settled down upon him like a cloud. Standing a little apart, he looked from Tilbury's handsome face to his host's stolid figure, and from them to the blonde furniture and heavy curtains, and felt leagues away from the chatter and laughter. He made up his mind that, unless Octavia asked him, he would not go to the ball.

Jessica came up to him.

"The Town Hall's draughty and there's nowhere to sit or talk," she said. "I advise you not to go to-night."

"You wouldn't like to come for a moment and go away early with me, would you? It might be amusing," said Susan Malet.

"Nothing funny about a Harbington hunt ball! Tepid people, hot champagne, crowds and draughts, and by God! even the hardiest fox couldn't eat the chickens!" said Tilbury.

"But," said Susan, addressing Greville, "we want you to feel proud of your bride on her first public appearance."

At that moment the door opened and Octavia came into the room. Her dress was cut off the shoulders, and she had pinned the diamond bandeau that her parents had given her tightly round her hair. Except for Sir Harry Pelham's pearls, she wore no jewels, and the long line of her black dress heightened the whiteness of her skin. She carried her little head proudly, as of someone to whom experience had brought dignity: there was a look of expectancy in the challenge of her eyes. Everyone stopped talking.

Moved by her beauty, Greville said:

"I can feel proud of her in private—and indeed everywhere, can't I?"

"We're all allowed to do that!" said Sir Harry, going up to Octavia.

"Is Greville saying he doesn't like public brides?" said Octavia, looking at her husband.

"Not at all," said Jessica; "he was saying he'd reserve himself for our dinner to-morrow, and he's perfectly right. You mustn't let him go, darling. Balls are only amusing in anticipation; I confess they always bored me even when I was young. Let's go in to dinner."

Jessica was reminded of what a Frenchman said: "*Ne fais attention qu'à ce qui n'est pas dit*," as she listened to Greville's disjointed observations at dinner and observed his languid interest when the conversation became general.

Excited at the thought of meeting Robin, and pleased at the admiration expressed by the company for her appearance, Octavia longed to say something nice to Greville when



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they left the dining-room ; but she felt uncertain how to approach him.

" Susan, you'll take Tilbury and Octavia, and Sir Harry, Brab and I will go together," said Jessica, pulling her furs round her shoulders in the front hall.

" Would you like to have come ? " said Octavia in a low voice, giving Greville her cloak.

" It's a little late, isn't it ? " said Greville.

" D'you mean the ball ? "

" No ; I mean to have asked me," he answered.

Chilled by his reply, Octavia wished she had not spoken.

The Harbington Town Hall was decorated with festoons of coloured muslin, and there was a large gathering of badly dressed and happy people.

Octavia was looking round the room, when Sir Guy Coventry went up to her.

" I *am* glad to see you, Master ! Is Lady Julia here ? " said Octavia, wondering if he knew anything about her talk with his mother.

" D'you want her ? "

" Of course I do. Hounds meet at Stanton Starkey Saturday, don't they ? "

" Yes : beastly place—but we always meet there after the hunt ball. Are you going with the Bragg to-morrow ? Better not."

" Why ? Do you think two days' hunting would be too much for me ? "

" Of course," he replied.

" Don't I look well ? " said Octavia.

" By Gad ! " was all the Master could say, with an expression of stunned admiration.

" Shall we experiment ? " said Tilbury, coming up to her. " Better tell me what they're playing ; if it's one of those Topsy dances, I'm not a flyer."

" There's my mother," said the Master, pointing to Lady Julia sitting the other side of the room.

"I'll talk to her after this dance," said Octavia, whirling off with Tilbury.

Susan Malet heard a man standing in front of her say to his neighbour :

"How that Daventry girl's come on in looks. Great Scott ! I shouldn't have known her !"

"And, my God, what a mover ! If she were a horse I'd sell my whole stud to buy her."

"Pelham would have a high reserve, you bet !" said the other.

"The Harbington shove harder in the ball-room than the hunting field, and if we go on, we'll have to engage an osteopath," said Tilbury, after bumping breathlessly round the room.

"Let's sit down, then. Tell me, have you had fun ?"

"I expect you've a lot more to tell me than I have. You've been the devil of a time away from us, Octavia. Was it ripping down there ? Did you spin the ball a bit at Monte ?" said Tilbury, guiding her to a chair.

"We never went near Monte Carlo, and it wasn't a bit amusing. I loathe the Riviera ! The scenery appears to be an arranged landscape for bad painters : even the beauty doesn't seem real. I never thought I should live to say I longed for clouds. I've come to the conclusion that bright blue and bright green are not colours to live with. How's Cunning Kate ?"

"She's all right and waiting for you. I say, is Pelham going to let you see the season out down here with us ?"

"He doesn't mind in the least what I do," said Octavia.

"You won't make anyone believe that !" said Tilbury.

"He's not the sort of fellow to ride a horse on the snaffle."

"D'you think his hands would be light enough to ride on anything else ?" she said.

"I'm not sure. Greville takes a lot of knowing. I've changed my views a bit about him."

"Didn't you like him ?"



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"I can't honestly say I did. His smile came off the ice a bit too often for me."

"What's made you change?"

"Well . . . he's a jolly good plucked 'un!"

"What makes you think so?" said Octavia.

"I admire him for marrying you," said Tilbury, looking at her.

"Don't you think I deserve to be congratulated on *my* courage?" she asked.

"No; I've always backed you to spot a winner. We all wanted to marry you, but you chose the best of us."

"Greville's not an easy man, you know," said Octavia, dimly feeling as if she had been reproached.

The music stopped and the breathless couples scattered towards the exits. A group of men were blocking the doorway at the other end of the ball-room, and among them Octavia saw Robin Compton. He was leaning against the wall, with his hands in his pockets and feet thrust out, talking to men she did not know. She felt certain he had seen her. Turning with renewed interest to Tilbury, she said:

"Tell me now, if Greville and I were to be sold at Tattersalls, which would you buy?"

"It's not a fair question, Octavia—you know perfectly well. But if I had to mark a card for a friend who wanted only one horse and couldn't afford to hunt in a grass country, I believe I'd put a mark at Pelham's name."

At that moment the music struck up and Sir Guy crossed the floor.

"Going to talk to my mother, eh?"

"No," said Robin, who had come up behind him. "She's engaged to dance this with me."

"Oh!" said the Master.

Tilbury got up.

"Are you going to treat us to the jungles or be kind to strangers on Saturday, Sir Guy?" he said as they moved away together.

"You'll take me in to supper, won't you, Master?" said Octavia, calling after them.

Sir Guy stopped, turned, and nodded.

"Did you get my letter when you arrived?" said Robin, sitting down slowly beside her.

"Yes."

"Were you vexed with it?"

"About your present, d'you mean?"

"Not that particularly—I always meant to wait for you to choose it yourself; but what I said about not going to your wedding."

"I didn't expect you to go, but I thought you'd write. . . . You've been a long time in writing to me."

Robin could not be sure from her tone if she had minded his not writing to her.

"You must never disturb people when they're engaged, or on their honeymoon," he said.

"I longed to be disturbed!" said Octavia with vehemence. "I thought I should never hear of you again!"

"You thought Havoc would kill me, did you—or did I promise to commit suicide? If I did, you could have had me up for breach of promise!" he said coolly and without looking at her.

Octavia could think of nothing better to say in answer than:

"How's Havoc? Could I ride him?"

"Are you going to hunt down here?" he said.

"Of course I am; did you think I was going to give up hunting?"

"One never can tell!—I advise you to start on Kilmallock. Miss Dawkins has been going great guns on him."

"Has she? Did you mount her on Havoc?"

"I thought of it, but I was short of horses. Tilbury gave me a day on Cunning Kate."

"Did you find her what they call 'workmanlike' down here?" said Octavia.



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"D'you dislike that expression? It seems harmless to me. But you rode her, didn't you?"

"Yes: Tilbury is an angel to me! I found her perfect."

"I daresay Tilbury would exchange her with you for Havoc."

"Do you want to sell Havoc?" said Octavia.

"He's your horse, and you must do what you like with him. I'm at your orders."

"May I ride him?" she asked.

"It's hardly for me to decide what you may and what you may not do, is it?" he answered.

"I wonder!" said Octavia, adding after a pause: "Do you think Merlin is the person to decide?"

"I wasn't thinking of Merlin," he replied.

The band was playing loud and harsh, and Octavia looked about to see if there was not a better place in which they could sit.

"Is that one of your trousseau dresses?" asked Robin.

"Yes," she said, turning round; "I had it made long, as I think velvet dresses oughtn't to be short. Do you like it?"

"I'll tell you later when I've had a proper look at you."

"Let's dance," said Octavia, thinking other people might be watching them.

"I don't like the thing they're playing. I'll tell them to change it," said Robin, getting up. "Wait there and I'll speak to the bandsman; he's an old friend of mine."

Octavia watched him steering his way through the dancers with the movement she had always admired, and wondered at his insolent suggestion.

Robin succeeded in changing the music to a valse and returned to her.

Every eye was on Robin and Octavia as, like a beautiful ship being launched, they started down the middle of the room, circling backwards and forwards in perfect unison and with almost conscious grace.

Feeling the pressure of his arm and the smoothness of his

movement under her, Octavia abandoned herself to the thrill that always came to her from physical exercise. Before the music stopped she said in a low voice :

“How wonderfully you dance ! Why is it we’ve never danced together before ? ”

“There are several things we’ve never done together,” he said, looking down at her.

They danced till the last bar of the music was played.

“We can’t talk here ; let’s go and sit where it’s cool,” he said, walking towards the doorway and pointing to the staircase.

For several moments they sat without speaking.

“Shall I tell you now what I think of your looks ? ” he said, lolling back against the banisters.

“You can tell me to-morrow,” she said, trying to speak without concern. “Only don’t say black velvet is too old for me !—I want to feel young and gay to-night.”

“And I suppose you feel old and dull, do you ? ” he said, noting the breathless radiance of her face.

“Is that how I strike you ? ” she asked.

“I’ll wait till I’ve seen more of you before I answer. You forget what a lot has happened since we parted,” he replied.

“No, I don’t ; I never forget anything ! ”

“I should find that embarrassing. You always said no one should live backwards ; and I for one think it was good advice,” he said.

“One says that sort of thing when one knows *nothing*—when you think ideals should be pursued and even captured.” Robin listened to a note in her voice that he had not heard before. He paused before replying.

“And do you think differently now ? ” he said.

“I’m inclined to think I do. Pursuing needs more tenacity than I’ve got, especially when the ideal gets dim and you don’t see it clearly.”

“I’m afraid you wouldn’t make a good hound ! ” he said.



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"You mean I'd give up too soon?"

"Yes, that's what I mean," he said, taking his cigarette-case out of his pocket. Octavia tried to make out what was passing in his mind.

"You used to think I was plucky," she said.

"I wasn't doubting your pluck, but your patience," he replied, throwing the match away.

A vague feeling that she was being misunderstood came over Octavia.

"How do you know I'm not patient?" she said.

"I don't believe marriage has changed you as much as all that—but of course I may be wrong."

"No, you're right. Marriage hasn't changed me at all. *Did you hope it would?*"

Octavia waited for his answer.

"I don't believe any of us know if we change or not—at least, I don't. I've seen extraordinary changes in quite commonplace people," said Robin.

"I daresay; but only after some great experience."

"Wouldn't you call marriage an experience?" he asked.

"I should call it an experiment. . . . How would you define experiment?"

"I don't know, but I should say it was a kind of test."

"What sort of test?" said Octavia.

"Tests try everyone differently. Some people are like horses: they never test themselves at all."

"Have you ever tested yourself?" said Octavia, glancing at him quickly.

Robin drew himself up; looking at her for a moment without speaking, he said:

"Yes—once."

## CHAPTER XXI

### *THE DINNER-PARTY*

WHEN left to himself, the memory of Octavia's beauty hung about and haunted Greville's mind and heart: he was overcome by a sense of immense isolation. His aspirations, his theories, his ideals, stood round him like spectres. Doubts rose in his mind whether his work had been a blessing or a curse. Working for the good of the universe!—how ridiculous it sounded. He was reminded of Carlyle's comment when told that the American high-brow—Margaret Fuller—had said she accepted the universe. “Gad! she'd better.”

He wandered round the room listening to the clock. It seemed to be ticking off the time like scissors cutting ribbon. He wondered if he had the capacity for happiness.

In spite of his self-absorption, Greville Pelham had never been pleased with himself. Some people have warm corners for themselves; a few are embarrassed by themselves; others are beglamoured, and the majority are unconcerned. But Greville had always tormented himself. Causes had bulked larger than persons in his life, and he had had no way of measuring himself by the side of other people. He was not conscious of being vexed with Octavia: his mind was blurred. He was furious with himself and with Fate.

After wandering round the novels and books of reference in Colonel Brabazon's library, and looking absently through his correspondence, he lit his pipe and sat down to watch the logs spluttering on the fire.



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All that was clear to his tired mind was that whenever he had been unhappy in the past he had found consolation in silence and in work. He determined he would go to London the next day. Had it not been for the fear of appearing indifferent to festivities arranged in their honour, he would have chosen to remain in London; and when he went to bed he said to himself, "If I had the pluck of a rabbit I would not come back till I felt less horribly, hopelessly out of it." But this seemed to point to a certain weakness, and he was afraid his absence might provoke remark.

He lay awake far into the night, till he fell into a disturbed and uncomfortable sleep, from which he was woken by the sound of footsteps and talking.

He recognized Robin's voice.

"No, no! Mrs. Brab, you're doing me an injustice! My life's one long conflict between pleasure and pleasure," Robin was saying. And in the laughter that followed, Greville heard Octavia shut her bedroom door.

After the fatigue of her journey from France and the late hour at which she had returned from the ball, Octavia slept like a child.

Sir Harry, Robin, and Tilbury were hunting with the Bragg, and when she came down she found Susan and Jessica finishing their luncheon alone.

"Where's Greville?" said Octavia with surprise.

"Didn't you know he was going to London for the day?" said Jessica.

Octavia was annoyed.

"It's silly of him to work so hard when he's not well," she said, helping herself at the sideboard.

"Men never take care of themselves—they expect us women to do it for them," said Jessica, lighting a cigarette.

"Greville detests anyone taking care of him," said Octavia.

"That's a little hard on you, isn't it, darling?" said Jessica, looking at her through the smoke of her cigarette.

"Why? D'you think I'm cut out to be a hospital nurse? There's no profession I should dislike so much!"

There was a touch of asperity in Octavia's reply which produced silence.

When luncheon was over, Octavia walked across the fields to see her horses.

Left to themselves, Susan said to Jessica.

"I don't feel very happy about Octavia. She seems brittle and edgy, and somehow unlike herself."

"I know what you mean—Octavia has matured. I knew she would, but she's in great looks!—I never saw her as lovely as she looked last night. All the men asked to be introduced to her, but I didn't notice her dancing with many of them; did you?"

Susan was afraid Jessica was going to say something about Robin, so she said hurriedly:

"They all dance so badly. Dancing with Tilbury is like a railway accident, and the Master is on the top of one like loose luggage."

"One can hardly be surprised that she preferred Robin, can one?" said Jessica, looking at Susan. Seeing she did not respond, she continued: "Weren't you amused at Mrs. Freemantle's coiffure? That mixture of hearse and chandelier! And poor Miss Dawkins, with the flannel flowers dripping over her mauve shoulders!"

"I was glad Greville didn't go," said Susan.

"*He* looks ill and worried if you like!" said Jessica. "I'm much more bothered about him than Octavia. I don't see him enjoying our dinner to-night. I've arranged to clear the floor and dance. Some of last night's people said they'd motor over. It's better than talking."

"I think it's an excellent idea. Talking is tiring," said Susan.

"No one can say the Master's conversation is inspiring! I heard that wicked Octavia say to him at supper she didn't want to hear any risky stories. Poor Guy gazed at her like



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a bull at a train and said : ' When have I ever told a risky story ? ' at which she said : ' I mean, don't risk telling me something that won't amuse me ! ' I confess Guy bores me ! I liked him better before I called him by his Christian name."

Susan was not listening.

" Octavia was far too young to marry a serious man," she said thoughtfully.

" We're all too young to have married Greville ! I confess I'm sorry for Octavia. I should hate her to lose any of her glorious vitality. We must try and help her."

" By helping, I suppose you mean amusing her," said Susan.

" Well, of course ! Surely, Susan, you don't want her to lose her radiance ? I've no patience with Greville ; he's in danger of becoming a crashing bore ! "

The door opened and Octavia came into the room.

" How naughty of you, darling, to walk when you might have had the brougham ! You'll be too tired to dance," said Jessica.

" Are we dancing here to-night ? "

" I thought it would be fun. We might open with a lancers. You and Brab, and Greville and I, would dance. We could easily show him the figures between us."

" But Greville never dances ! " said Octavia.

" I don't suppose you've ever asked him, my dear ! Have you ever been to a ball together ? "

" *You* can ask him if you like ; *I* certainly shan't," said Octavia, nettled by Jessica's remark.

" It might amuse him," said Susan gently. " After all, it's only nonsense the sort of lancers that we dance."

" Greville doesn't care for nonsense," said Octavia.

After this there was a silence, broken by the servants coming in to draw the curtains. Susan Malet left the room.

When the servants had gone, Jessica said :

" You'll wear your lovely rose tulle, Octavia, and I hope

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you'll dance with one or two of the forlorn admirers I introduced you to last night. You don't know *how* keen I am that you should enjoy yourself down here, darling."

Octavia was vexed with herself for having spoken sharply.

"But of course I'm enjoying myself!" she said. "Did you think I looked bored last night?"

Jessica did not answer. She got up and, sitting on the sofa beside Octavia, put her arm round her and said with tenderness:

"If there's anything that makes you unhappy, darling, you must tell me. You know you can count on my understanding. Susan and I were saying, as you came into the room, how we should hate you to lose any of your radiance."

Something in Jessica's voice and manner roused Octavia. She felt as if she had been struck in the face. Was it possible that her relations with her husband had been a topic of spiteful investigation? That Jessica, or anyone, should dare to pity her was an outrage! Feeling hot all over, she drew herself away.

"I don't know what you mean," she said. "I'm sorry if you thought I looked dull last night. I thought I was looking my best!"

Jessica knew that she had made a wrong entry, and hastened to say she had never seen Octavia look so pretty; but it sounded like an after-thought. She was relieved when the door opened and Greville came in.

"Whom do you think I met in London to-day?" he said.

"Someone I know—a man?" asked Jessica with exaggerated animation.

"It's a man; but you don't know him."

"Is he a friend of yours or mine?" said Octavia.

"I look on him as a friend, because you've told me so much about him, but I only met him to talk to once."

"You don't mean to say you met the Professor!" said Octavia. "How wonderful, Greville! Do tell me—where did you meet him?"



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"He was lunching at Brooks's and I was free to-night, so I asked him down here. If there's no room, he can stay at Chivers."

"But, my dear Greville, we shall be enchanted to see him! He can have Susan's room—the little one next to Octavia's. She's leaving us to-night."

"I hope you don't think I was . . ."

"Not at all," interrupted Jessica. "I always told Octavia that I wanted the Professor to come here, didn't I?"

"That's very nice of you," said Greville.

"He could catch the 6.50 and be here for dinner. If he's staying at Brooks's, just get through, Octavia—Gerrard 3745. Tell him Brab always comes by that train."

Octavia ran out of the room as if she had had a reprieve. The excitement of seeing her friend dispelled some of her uncomfortable reflections.

She had no difficulty in getting on to the club. To her delight the Professor said he would come down by the 6.50. Octavia remained talking to him for some time, and when she went back to the drawing-room the fox-hunters had returned. Greville had gone up to his bedroom.

"You missed nothing to-day, Octavia," said Sir Harry. "We didn't find for ages, and then ran right out of our country."

"I never remember a longer, drearier day; and would you believe it," said Tilbury, "they kept up the ball till five this morning; no wonder the women looked as green as leeks!"

Octavia could hardly listen, and after telling Jessica that the Professor would come by the 6.50, she went out of the room, leaving them drinking brandies and sodas.

Stopping in the passage outside Greville's bedroom door, she had a great yearning to say, or to hear, something—she did not quite know what—but something warm and loving. Her heart beat, and she felt a certain shyness as she tapped at his door.

"Am I disturbing you?" she said.

"Not at all. I'm glad to see you looking so happy. Did you know the Professor was going to be in London?"

"No! I've only written to him once . . ." Octavia was going to add "on our honeymoon," but stopped.

"I thought you always wrote to him."

"You never told me you were going to London to-day," she said, seating herself by the fire on the arm of his chair.

"Didn't I? I thought you knew. Have you had a nice day?"

"Not at all!" she said, looking at him and thinking of something else.

"You wished you had been out hunting, I suppose."

"No—it wasn't that, but . . ."

"If you please, ma'am, Lord Tilbury wants to know if you would like a second horse for to-morrow," said Jenkins, opening the door.

"Tell him I'll let him know later."

Octavia fidgeted about on the arm of the chair while Greville puffed at his pipe. At last she said:

"They're going to drink our healths to-night, Greville."

"How do you know?" he said, taking the pipe out of his mouth.

"Tilbury told me."

"Dear me! then you'll have to respond to it," he said, without enthusiasm.

"I don't see how I can be expected to do that," said Octavia.

"Speeches make everyone ridiculous on an occasion like this."

"But surely it's the bridegroom's place!—and why not be ridiculous sometimes?" she exclaimed, chafing at his imperturbability.

"Is it as a bridegroom or a jester that you wish me to respond to the toast?" he said, knocking the ashes out of his pipe against the grate. Some invisible power seemed to be



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urging Greville to say things he did not intend to. His coldness communicated itself to Octavia. She got up from the arm of his chair.

"Whichever you prefer," she replied in a toneless voice, walking away from him.

Octavia shut the door of her bedroom. Greville's unresponsiveness had taken the bloom off her joy at the prospect of seeing the Professor. She hungered for sympathy; not the sort of humiliating sympathy that Jessica had proffered, but for something she could not have defined. She flung herself down on the bed and large tears came into her eyes, as she fondled the idea that no one understood her.

Professor Horncastle hoped when he came to London that he would see Octavia. He had been perturbed when he had received her letter from San Remo, but, knowing her changes of humour, had refrained from answering. After listening to the emphasis of her words on the telephone, he was certain that she needed him. He made up his mind he would catch the train to Harbington.

When he arrived at St. Mildred's, Colonel Brabazon—who had dressed early—received him on the doorstep, and after explaining that the house was full, took him up to dress in his own bedroom.

"Our neighbour, Mrs. Malet, is leaving us to-night, and you'll have her bedroom. It's the dressing-room next to Octavia's and rather small; but I hope you won't mind," said the Colonel.

When the Professor came down to dinner, Mrs. Brabazon introduced him to the company. He was talking to Robin and Greville when Octavia came into the room. Her delight at seeing him was so great that it almost dispelled the clouds from her mind; but as everyone was looking at her she could only squeeze his hand and say in a low voice:

"I knew you would come."

"You'll find us all very frivolous to-night, Professor."

This is a party given in honour of our bride and bridegroom, and we're going to dance. Will you sit on my right ? " said Jessica.

The Professor bowed and dinner was announced.

" Say you're glad to see me," whispered Octavia ; turning to Colonel Brabazon, she took his arm and they walked into the dining-room.

Colonel Brabazon sat between Octavia and Lady Julia, and his wife between the Master and the Professor ; Greville was on the other side of the Professor. Mr. and Mrs. Freemantle, Lord Tilbury, and Jack Cuthbert made up the rest of the party.

" We should have been thirteen without you, so you see you've brought us luck," said Jessica to the Professor.

" Are you superstitious, Mrs. Brabazon ? "

" To tell you the truth, I'm not ; but so many people *are*, that I avoid being thirteen if I possibly can. You're Octavia's oldest friend, aren't you ? "

" I'm afraid I am ; but she makes me feel young," he replied.

" You must teach her to make her husband feel young. Don't you think he looks ill ? "

" He *has* been ill, hasn't he ? " said the Professor. " Some of the strongest men I know look delicate."

" How long is it since you've seen Octavia ? "

" I haven't seen her since her wedding."

" No one can say *she's* ill ! Did you ever see anyone look so lovely ? Was she always as pretty as she is now ? "

The Professor looked across the table at Octavia.

" Yes ; always. I don't think she has changed since the first day I saw her."

" I wonder if you're right. Women are very deceptive. I think Octavia is more beautiful than she was when I first saw her ; but I think you'll find she's changed—not in character, of course."

" Heine says that no woman has a character, because she



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has a new one every day. Would you agree to that ? ” said the Professor.

The Master was tired of Jessica’s shoulder being turned to him, and in the pause that followed the Professor’s remark, he said :

“ Did they pretend there was a scent with the Bragg to-day ; eh—Mrs. Brab ? ”

“ No, dear Guy—they all said they had had a very bad day,” said Jessica.

The dinner proceeded gaily amidst a clatter of conversation and champagne. When the servants left the room, Colonel Brabazon got up and, lifting his glass, invited his hearers in a short speech to drink to the health of the bride and bridegroom.

Cheers greeted his well-rehearsed remarks, and they all stood up and drank to the toast. After this there was a disconcerting pause. Octavia was about to move, when Greville rose to his feet with the indolence that had always characterized his movements. In a short and unexpected speech he responded to the toast. Everyone clapped with enthusiasm when he sat down. Octavia felt unaccountably moved by what he had said and longed for him to look at her ; but he was listening with bent head to Mrs. Freemantle’s voluble congratulations.

“ By God ! Greville ought to be a Cabinet Minister ! ” said Tilbury, turning to Octavia.

“ Do you think I would make a good wife to a Cabinet Minister ? ” she asked.

“ I should rather say so ! But who wouldn’t you make a good wife to ! ” said Tilbury, gazing at her.

Octavia felt a faint pang at this remark and Tilbury filled her empty glass.

Jessica received her guests after the dinner was over, and was pleased to see how well her servants had arranged the flowers, screens, and chairs. She had engaged a band from London and was determined that her dance should be a

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success. Her only anxiety was the Professor. Seeing him talking to Greville, she went up to them.

"If you want a little peace you can sit in there," she said, pointing to the door of the library; "when I've started the dance I would like to come and talk to you, Professor."

"I'm at your disposal, but you mustn't worry about me. I'm always perfectly happy," said the Professor, following Greville into the library.

Octavia was standing alone, half hidden by palms, at the empty end of the ball-room. Her spirits had partially returned and she was resolved to dance with all the partners she had neglected the night before. She looked about and wondered what had become of Robin. The lancers had been abandoned and the band was playing a valse. It was the same tune that Robin had asked for the night before, and Octavia's blood danced at the recollection. Susan Malet came up to her.

"I'm off to-night, and shan't see you again, I'm afraid; but if you're staying on, will you come and see me?"

Octavia, who was concentrated on finding Robin, answered absently:

"Of course; and you'll come and see us, though London won't be amusing, I'm afraid."

Susan detected a note of dejection in Octavia's remark.

"We've hardly had a word together, have we? But you know, my darling child, if you want me I'm always there."

Something in Susan's voice reminded Octavia of what Jessica had said, and her preoccupation vanished. She was about to reply when Robin came up to her.

"Our dance, I think," he said.

Susan kissed Octavia and left them.

"What were you talking about? You look very solemn."

"Really, it's unendurable everyone telling me I look dull! I wish to God they'd leave me alone!" said Octavia in a voice of exasperation, walking away from the ball-room.

"I can hardly believe anyone has been abusing your



looks," he said, following her. Seeing tears in her eyes, he said gravely :

"Octavia, you are tired. Let's sit over there, away from the people."

He pointed to a seat in the conservatory hidden among azaleas.

"No, no, I'd rather dance ! Where's Greville ? "

"Do you want him ? "

"Not in the least ; I only wondered if he had gone to his bedroom."

"Why ? He's not ill, is he ? "

"I'm sure *I* don't know ! Lend me your handkerchief ; I've got a cold in my head," she said, turning into the conservatory.

"If you wait one moment I'll go and see what he's doing," said Robin, giving her his pocket-handkerchief.

After looking about, Robin found Greville and the Professor absorbed in conversation in the library and returned to Octavia.

"Greville's quite happy talking to the Professor," he said, standing in front of her.

Octavia was vexed with herself. Looking at him with dewy eyes, she said :

"I suppose you think me a perfect fool ! "

"You'll be surprised to hear I don't think you're either dull, plain, or stupid. Come and dance. At twelve o'clock I want you to meet me in the billiard-room."

"Why ? " she asked with curiosity.

"Ah ! that's my secret," he said, taking back his handkerchief.

"You're very sweet to me, Robin," said Octavia as she put her hand through his arm.

"You told me once I was never to forget to care for you. So you see—as always, I'm obeying your injunctions," he said, without looking at her. They walked back to the ball-room.

They had hardly taken a turn round the room before the music stopped. Smithson, Tilbury, and the Master surrounded Octavia ; but she was not in the humour to dance. Seeing Lady Julia sitting by herself, she said :

" I'll dance the one after this with you, Mr. Smithson ; I want to talk to Lady Julia."

" Have a little fizz ; you look tired," said Tilbury.

" No, I don't want champagne. Just find Sir Harry for me, and tell him not to neglect the Professor," said Octavia, and walking across the floor she sat down beside Lady Julia.

The success Greville had had with his speech had restored his self-confidence. Although he had not spoken to Octavia, he knew what he said had given her pleasure. He wished he could have found the courage to approach her. But when Jessica pointed to the library door, he was grateful to get away from the company. It was not long before he was engrossed in conversation with the Professor.

In a numb and unexpressed way Greville felt he had found a friend, and was so interested in what he was saying that he did not realize how long they had been together.

The door opened and Jessica came in.

" I must have a word with you," she said to the Professor. " You've monopolized him long enough, Greville."

Sir Harry Pelham interrupted them.

" As I'm hunting to-morrow, Professor, I'd like to talk to you. I've been sent here by Octavia. Mrs. Brab, you won't be allowed to go to bed, so you can talk to him later on."

" Very well," said Jessica, walking away with Greville.

" It was very sweet of you, Greville, to speak to-night ; did Octavia ask you to do it ?" she said.

" I wanted *her* to do it ; it came to the same thing !"

" I hope you're not bored. Octavia adores dancing, but I don't suppose she'll expect you to go to many balls with her," said Jessica.

" I don't think she expects me to go to any," he replied.



## THE DINNER-PARTY

Anxious to get off the subject of his wife, he added : " Professor Horncastle is an interesting man."

" He's Octavia's oldest friend, and I think he has more influence over her than anyone, from what she told me. D'you think she's influenceable ? " said Jessica.

Greville did not answer, and was relieved when they were joined by Susan. They all three sat and watched the dancers.

Jessica would like to have talked to Greville alone. She felt a mixture of pity and curiosity as she looked at his bored and handsome face, and felt that everything she had said about him had been justified. Serious men made heavy husbands.

Greville would not have stayed another moment in the ball-room, but he wanted to see Octavia dancing. He looked round the room at the whirling couples and scarlet coats. Susan Malet got up and said good-bye, and Jessica suggested to Greville that they should go and talk somewhere else.

They made their way down a long corridor to the empty billiard-room. Opening the door, they suddenly came upon Octavia seated on a sofa with Robin beside her. He was leaning over her holding her hand, and examining the jewels on her wrist.

Seeing them approach, he held her hand firmly.

" Ah ! here you are," he said without moving—" you've come at the right moment : you must help Octavia to choose which of these two bracelets she prefers. I'm giving her a belated wedding present."

" Tell him he mustn't spend so much money on me," said Octavia, looking down and fumbling with her bracelets.

" I'm not a good judge either of jewels, or Compton's resources," said Greville, " but I should choose the one I liked best."

" I can assure you I'm a man of means ! " said Robin, getting up.

## OCTAVIA

After an examination Jessica made a suggestion, and Octavia returned the bracelets to Robin.

"This one is perfectly lovely, and far too good for me. Now I must go ; I'm engaged to dance with the Master—you might find him for me, Robin, will you ? "

She put her arm through Greville's and they all walked out of the billiard-room.

Greville knew by her flushed and excited face when she fumbled with her bracelets exactly what was passing in Octavia's mind, and felt a tug at his heart when she put her hand through his arm. He knew that her action was prompted by a fear that he might be jealous ; and an overwhelming longing came over him to tell her that the only jealousy he felt for Robin or for any other man was of their power to attract women. But Jessica and Robin were within hearing ; and he knew if he began telling Octavia all the sensations that were gnawing at his heart it would entail a long explanation. He could not bear the idea that she should think him jealous, and bitterly regretted the taciturnity he had shown her. If he never told her, how could she guess his complicated sensations ? Seized with a sudden courage and feeling the pressure of her hand on his arm, he lowered his voice.

"Don't be late to-night, darling," he said a little hoarsely. Octavia was afraid that if she said anything charming, Greville would think of Robin holding her hand : and not noticing the expression on his face she gave his arm a squeeze.

"No ; no, of course not ; it's a funny thing, you know, but dancing never tires me," she said.

Several people came up to them.

"What about our dance, eh ? " said the Master.

Greville watched them walking away together, and as he could not have spoken a word to anybody, he went up to his bedroom.

The Professor had purposely avoided talking to Octavia. He knew if he began she would probably not return to the



## THE DINNER-PARTY

ball-room, and preferred a more suitable occasion to listen to what she might have to say to him. Having spent most of the evening in the library, he wanted to go to bed. He went into the front hall and saw Octavia surrounded by young men. They were all drinking at a buffet.

"I shall say good night to you now," he said.

Octavia was excited.

"Oh! don't go just this minute; I must talk to you," she said, putting down her glass.

"We can talk when you come back from hunting to-morrow; and Sunday we shall be together," he said.

"Wait one moment, Mr. Cuthbert, and I'll come back to you," said Octavia, walking towards the staircase with the Professor.

"You're sure you've not been bored?" she said breathlessly.

"How could I be bored, my dearest child, when I see you so gay and pretty."

Octavia put her hand through his arm.

"Thank God, you at any rate don't think I'm a failure," she said.

The Professor knew Octavia too well to answer.

"I'm not going to talk to you to-night," he said. "We will have a long talk to-morrow. Now you must go and enjoy yourself."

He was distressed to see what looked like tears in Octavia's eyes.

"Bless you," she said, squeezing his hand. Turning round, she saw Robin Compton.

"Isn't this the dance you said you were going to give me?" he said.

"No: I'm engaged to Jack Cuthbert."

"But he's dancing," said Robin with his habitual disregard for the truth when he meant to have his own way.

"Oughtn't I to dance with some of the others, Robin?"

"Certainly—later on. But I dance better than Cuthbert!"

"I don't want to dance," she said with the petulance of a tired child.

Robin examined her closely.

"In that case," he said coolly, "you'll talk to me."

Pointing to the long corridor—which was dimly lighted—he said:

"Let's go where nobody will interrupt us."

. . . . .  
The Professor lay awake listening to the music, and feeling the floor of the room trembling at his feet. He thought of Octavia, and the letter he had received from her on her honeymoon. Was it a sudden impulse that had made her write "The Riviera will always, all ways remind me of what I felt the moment I was engaged. Marriage is a façade that stands between human beings and love."

It was past two o'clock when the music ceased. He heard voices talking through the wall near his bed.

"Go away, Greville! I don't love you when you are rough . . . I'm horribly tired."

He could not hear the next few sentences.

"I can't bear to hear you say that!—You know it's not true," he heard Octavia say.

Greville's reply was inaudible.

Then he heard the door of their room open and shut with a bang.



## CHAPTER XXII

### *SURRENDER*

THE Professor's love for Octavia was deep-seated. Her impulsive letters, their intimate talks, and the long days spent in the heather, had been the holidays of his tranquil life.

Dazzling as she had appeared dancing that night in her rose-coloured dress, he divined she was not the Octavia that he knew : she was not herself. His doubts had been confirmed when she had said to him, as they parted at the foot of the staircase :

*"You at any rate don't think I'm a failure."*

He had purposely refrained from answering her letter from San Remo, as he knew that in certain humours Octavia's pen was not reliable. But though he had often told her she was an expressionist and dramatized herself, there was something between the lines of what she had written that made him uneasy. He remembered the talk they had had on the day she had ridden from Dunross to announce her engagement ; her exhilaration when he had expressed his faith in her ; her mixed mood of dejection and excitement ; and her gravity when he told her that the big side of her would only be big when she gave it away. All these he remembered. Nor could he forget the different ways in which Octavia had always expressed the same idea—which was what had first attracted him—her sovereign contempt for surrender.

The conversation he had had with her husband that night

had convinced him that Greville was a man with a feeling mind, and a capacity for emotion. It had established confidence between them; the basis of which was respect for each other's attitude towards life. Each believed in the intellectual integrity of the other.

They had begun by discussing books and politics, and had ended on a more personal note: and the heated way Greville had concluded—as of someone burning to make himself understood—had left the Professor with a sense of his loneliness.

The broken sentences he had overheard through the wall of his bedroom kept him awake. Could there be an unsuspected antipathy between two people one of whom was so dear to him? Or was it ignorance on her part? Life was cruel, demanding wisdom from the young before they had the chance of acquiring it!—Innocence was admired, ignorance despised: yet, in their effects, they had a dangerous resemblance. The idea of breaking into Greville's or Octavia's confidence with a lantern and a jemmy was abhorrent to the Professor. All his experience of interference with other people's private affairs had been a failure. And what was there he could say that would justify interference now?

Nevertheless, after pondering these things in his heart, he made up his mind that he would talk to Octavia.

The next morning everyone met at a late breakfast. With the exception of Greville and the Professor they were all dressed for hunting. Sir Harry and his host discussed the day, and what prospects there were of having a run. Tilbury, Cuthbert, and Robin talked about Tattersalls and the reserves they intended to put on their horses; Greville was silent.

Octavia usually breakfasted in bed; but she was anxious to miss nothing of the Professor's visit; the last to come into the room, she sat with tired eyes, saying little. She pecked at her plate, glancing occasionally at her husband.



It had been arranged that Greville and the Professor should drive to the meet.

"You mustn't imagine we're always as late as this," said Sir Harry to the Professor, "but after a ball we take it easy. It'll amuse you to see the hounds. Stanton Starkey's not an interesting house, but the timber is fine. There's a famous wood there that Greville knows well. He'll show it to you."

"I'd like that very much. I daresay Octavia has told you I'm a tramp."

"You don't ride, Professor?" said Jessica.

"No: I wish I could. I always envied Rochester, who is described in 'Jane Eyre' as 'a practised and indefatigable horseman.' Even my favourite hero, Darcy, rode down a street once."

"You're fond of Jane Austen? I really think 'Pride and Prejudice' is the best novel ever written."

"You're quite right, Mrs. Brabazon; I never read a novel that I enjoyed more. It was said of an aunt of mine that she blushed every time the name of Darcy was mentioned," said the Professor.

Robin turned to Octavia.

"You will sympathize with that," he said. "If I remember right, you told me once you were in love with Darcy."

Seeing Octavia look embarrassed, Tilbury, whose presence of mind seldom deserted him, said:

"Now if you'd only told us that! we'd all have studied 'Pride and Prejudice.' I can't say I've read the book myself; but I remember Jane Austen's novels, because they were above my head at family prayers—the only occasion I ever looked at books."

Hawkins came into the dining-room and informed them it was time to start. They got up and left the breakfast table.

The horses were pacing round the gravel yard, and an open motor was waiting to take Greville and the Professor

to the meet. While they were mounting their horses and giving instructions to their grooms, Octavia went up to the Professor.

"You'll talk to me when I come home, won't you? I shan't make a long day.—You won't be lonely, will you?"

"I shall be quite happy—your husband and I have a lot to say to one another," he replied.

At the meet the crowd was too great for anyone to see more than the hounds and the horses; and after watching the field ride away, Greville and the Professor walked towards the woods.

Greville's mind was like a thunderstorm in a room with the windows shut. He was aware that he had put himself in the wrong with his wife the night before, when, impelled by a violent impulse to end an excruciating situation, he had gone into Octavia's bedroom. But mixed with his bitterness was a feeling of pride and—what was rare with him—of self-satisfaction. He could at any rate say that he had shown immense self-control; and if this was the way his life was to shape, he would standardize this self-control. He did not know what other men would have done in his situation, but he at any rate would never again expose himself to humiliation. Doubtless he had made a gigantic mistake; but no one should ever know it: neither Octavia nor any other living person should ever accuse him of breaking his word.

His face bore the expression of a man who had taken a great decision; and whose thoughts had already become acts.

They walked past the garden walls and budding almond trees; through the iron gates, leaving the house and the shrubberies behind them. The air was alive with the scents of spring. Wreaths of wide-eyed primroses and little violets peered out from among the young ferns and dead beech leaves. High trees standing far apart were bursting with grey and green, and the sun illumined the quiet paths under their feet. They walked without speaking.



Wishing to distract his companion as far as possible from what he imagined was gnawing at his mind, the Professor asked Greville if Clough's poems interested him ; and if he thought they would live. They argued about his "Amours de Voyage." The Professor said that the hero's character was well known, and that Claude was a type of genuine lover such as would always exist : the intellectual lover.

Greville asked the Professor if he remembered a line which ran like a refrain through the story :

"I think it's the only perfect hexameter in it. 'Mild monastic faces in quiet collegiate cloisters.' The fact is, Professor, Clough's hero was a *romantic* person ; he didn't know what passion meant : or if he did, he only knew it as something which made nonsense of the rest of his life. Claude is *not* the type of intellectual lover, but merely a monk who has lost his faith."

The Professor demurred.

"Surely passion is always a disturbing element in anyone's life. It tends to make the world a phantasmagoria. Yet it is in the common daylight world that a man's work and, ultimately, his happiness, lie."

"If passion is reciprocated, what lover would rejoice to return to what Clough calls 'the firm ground of abstraction' !" said Greville ; adding impetuously : "If it's *not* !—then he must fall back on pride. The theologians and the Saints have abused it ; they hold pride to be a deadly sin. But I think it acts as a trumpet call to *all* the virtues."

The Professor thought for a moment and then said :

"I don't think it safe to disregard entirely the experience of the Saints. Among the helpmates which pride summons to a man's rescue are three dangerous allies : anger, impatience, and contempt."

Greville did not answer. They walked on in silence. The Professor had had too many tramps with friends not to know that intimacy between two people increases if they can walk side by side without speaking. He had little doubt

now of what was passing in his companion's mind and felt a great compassion for him.

With the green beauty of the trees set far apart, and the patches of fern and flowers by which they were surrounded, he felt that conversation was not necessary. Nature was speaking to them.

After walking sometimes on the grass rides and sometimes in the tangled undergrowth, the Professor was moved to admiration.

"We have no woods like this in Scotland," he said.

"I don't think there's another wood quite like this," said Greville; "I'm fonder of it than anything in this country."

"I don't know if you're like me, but when I'm out of spirits, and my thoughts tangled and at a standstill, I can't bear to be indoors; the ceiling seems to come down upon my head: I long for the open sky."

Although the Professor was speaking without emphasis, and not looking at him, Greville felt as if a hand had been suddenly stretched out to him.

"If I had to live my life over again," he said, "I'd choose the country; but I daresay one only feels like that when, as you say, life gets tangled."

"D'you remember the lines in Marvell's poem?" said the Professor:

*"Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,  
Withdraws into its happiness;  
The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find;  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas,  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade."*

"I should like to know that by heart. Can you say it all?" said Greville.



## SURRENDER

"At one time I could ; but I'm not sure if I could now. It's a companionable thing remembering poetry that you like. Marvell's poems are a strange mixture of magnificence and foolery. There is a flavour in all he writes. You don't have much time for reading, I expect, do you ?" said the Professor.

"Well, I do ; because I travel so much. But somehow lately I don't seem to have read anything," said Greville, hitting the dead leaves at his feet with his stick.

Neither of them spoke.

"Tell me, Professor," he said suddenly, "have you ever been very unhappy ?"

"I have," he replied.

"D'you mind if I ask what you were unhappy about ?"

"Not at all : I was unhappy about a woman."

"I suppose it's always that," said Greville.

The rooks were cawing and circling overhead, and rabbits darted across the grass rides.

Greville stopped to light his pipe. It was some time before either of them spoke ; then he said :

"Do you know the Chinese say 'Che' when they say 'Yes,' and have no separate word for 'No.' They merely say 'Pou-che' which, translated, means : 'Not-Yes.' It's an ingenious way of concealing refusal, isn't it ?"

"The Chinese are a clever race. I believe they are right. One should never say 'no' in life," said the Professor gravely.

"You'll have to invent a new way of speaking English then," said Greville in a dry voice.

The Professor turned to him.

"I would like to say something to you. You mustn't mind what I'm going to say. I'm a much older man than you are. Don't give up when 'No' is said to you, whether it is spoken in English, or concealed by Chinese."

They had left the wood behind them, and the open road lay at their feet. When they arrived at St. Mildred's Greville excused himself from going in.

Jessica invariably went to bed after the shortest day's hunting. Cuthbert and Tilbury had gone back to Dashington, and Colonel Brabazon always rode home with the hounds. It was late before Octavia and Robin returned.

While the Professor was writing in his bedroom he received a note from Octavia to say she would talk to him in the billiard-room before dinner. When he went downstairs he found Robin Compton sitting alone in the library; the curtains were drawn, and tea was on the table.

"Have you had a good day?" he said. "How did Octavia get on? I thought she looked tired at breakfast."

"You wouldn't have thought she was tired if you'd seen her out hunting! She rode like a demon, and never listened to a word that was said to her. Twice at least she ought to have broken her neck," said Robin.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said the Professor.

"Why?"

"I don't know, but I'm not quite happy about her."

"I daresay you'll think it odd of me," said Robin abruptly, "but you are Octavia's oldest friend. I won't say you *know* her better than I do—for no one in the world could do that, but you know her well enough to have said what you have. I'm not happy about her either; and, what is more important, I don't think *she's* happy."

The Professor sat down opposite Robin.

"Octavia hasn't got much self-control. She's young, and doesn't understand the full meaning of life. It's a pity there is no one to interpret it to her," he said.

"I should have thought someone who loved her might say something to her," said Robin, looking at the Professor.

"Unfortunately the man who loves her best has been hurt, and doesn't perhaps understand how to handle her."

"I am the last person who should speak of self-indulgence," said Robin, "but Octavia's been spoilt from her earliest childhood. She's self-centred and self-indulgent."



## SURRENDER

What others want doesn't matter, but what *she* wants, she wants at once. As you say, she is very, very young."

"Do you know Greville Pelham?" asked the Professor.

"I don't know him from Adam!" said Robin, adding after a pause: "And I'm not sure that Octavia does. I mean—well, I think—she's a little afraid of him. Would you say he was a jealous man?"

"No; I don't think Greville's jealous of anything, except perhaps the sort of vitality that is independent of others, and carries its own happiness. He's a lonely man. What would you say?"

"To tell you the truth I've hardly ever spoken to him. All the people who know him say he's a good fellow." Robin thought for a moment: there was a conscious pause: then looking at the Professor he said: "I don't suppose I'm telling you anything you don't know, but Octavia is the only woman I've ever loved. I please the side of her that likes horses, and movement, and that sort of thing. But if she'd married me she wouldn't have been happy. I can't do much for her now because she's in a reckless sort of humour. Says her youth's over; that she's a failure, and all the rest of it."

"This humour will of course pass," said the Professor.

Sir Harry Pelham's voice was heard talking in the hall. They both got up. The Professor took Robin's hand.

"Don't imagine your love has done nothing for Octavia. I will speak to her," he said.

"My God!" said Sir Harry, coming into the room, "if you hadn't bought Octavia the best horse in the world, Robin, she'd have killed herself to-day. What a start she had when hounds crossed the line and she jumped the timber! I'm too old a bird to risk my neck when the scent's catchy. All the same I wish they'd run on. If hounds had picked up the scent the other side of the railway to-day, Octavia would be the happiest woman in England!"

"I wonder," said Robin as he left the room.

For the first time in her life Octavia felt self-conscious when she went into the billiard-room after tea. What was she going to say to the Professor—the man to whom she had always poured out her heart. If he had answered her letter from San Remo, or even alluded to it, it would have made her position easier. It was true that this was the first opportunity she had given him ; but he had only wanted to talk to her husband. What had they talked about ? The Co-operative Movement ? the speech he was going to make at the General Meeting ? or the philosophy of life ? Of one thing she was certain ; the Professor would not join in the atmosphere of sympathy and curiosity that she felt had surrounded her from the moment she and Greville had returned as bride and bridegroom.

No one knew better than Octavia that this atmosphere had been created by something in her own conduct ; and her pride in defying surrender was turning into uneasiness about herself.

The Professor was sitting on the sofa writing in a book. He looked up when she came in and shut the book.

“What are you writing, beloved Professor ?” she said, standing in front of him.

“I will show it to you later,” he said, taking off his glasses and making room for her on the sofa. She did not move.

“What were you thinking of when I came in ?”

“I was thinking of you,” he said.

“Why didn’t you answer my letter ? Had you forgotten me ?”

“No, my darling child, I had *not* forgotten you. I knew when I saw you you would let me talk to you.”

“*Let* you ?—you know I’d rather write to you, be with you, and talk to you, than anyone in the whole world !” she said, flinging herself down at the other end of the sofa.

“If that’s true, you won’t mind what I’m going to say to you now.”

“Yes, I shall : if you’re going to scold me.”



"Do I ever scold you, Octavia? Haven't I always believed in you?" said the Professor gently.

"You don't know how tired I am! . . . I hate everything and everybody—I don't want to ride! I don't want to dance! Greville never speaks to me—I don't even know where he is!"

"Be reasonable, Octavia; tell me one thing—are you happy?"

Octavia moved up and burying her head against the Professor's coat she burst into tears. He sat without moving. When she had collected herself she dried her eyes, and, holding his hand up to her face, said:

"What was it you were writing? Was it the Marcus Aurelius about changing our colour that you said you'd write for me?"

"No," he said; "I'll give you what I've written. You told me once that you would never change your colour and I believed you. Do you remember what I said to you the day you rode over to tell me of your engagement?"

"I remember a lot of things you said," she answered. "Is it anything particular you want me to remember?"

"Yes."

"You mean about the side of me that would only be big if I gave it away?" she said, looking down.

"Yes, that's what I mean."

The Professor opened the book and gave Octavia what he had written.

*"Ah! foolish woman, she who may  
On her sweet self set her own price,  
Knowing he cannot choose but pay,  
How has she cheapened Paradise—  
How given for nought her priceless gift,  
How spoiled the bread, and spilled the wine,  
Which, spent with due respective thrift,  
Had made brutes men, and men divine."*

She read it in silence. Then, putting her cheek against his, she left the room.

. . . . .

Greville took bundles of letters and papers up to his bedroom and sat far into the night reading, arranging, and making notes.

Although he was undressed, he was too restless to go to bed. He felt suffocated, and opened all the windows. He had to address a meeting the following week in Sheffield, where there had been a dispute among the older members of the Co-operatives, and was wondering what he could say that would conciliate them. He paced up and down the floor, but his mind was dismantled : he could not concentrate. He looked out of the window. It was cold, the moon was full and bright, and a mild wind was blowing. After throwing his notes and papers on the floor, he flung himself into an arm-chair.

The door opened and Octavia came into the room. She shut the door behind her. Her hair was dishevelled ; she had no shoes or stockings on. Her eyes were dark and soft, and the ribbon at the neck of her nightgown was unfastened. She stood without moving.

Greville jumped up.

“ For God’s sake go, Octavia ! ” he said. “ You’ll catch cold.”

He noticed the colour leave her cheeks. She did not move.

“ What do you want ? What have you come for ? ”

“ Don’t you want me ? ” she said with wide eyes.

“ Why have you come ? ” he said hoarsely.

Octavia lowered her eyelids and said nothing. They stood facing one another.

“ Do you wish me to go ? ” she said, standing where she was. Neither of them spoke. Losing his self-mastery Greville said :



"Don't torture me, Octavia! Tell me—why have you come?"

She made a step forward and held out her arms to him. Struggling to control her emotion, she said:

"You told me that some day—some day I would perhaps claim *you* . . . and this is why . . ."

He did not let her finish her sentence.

"My sweet, sweet heart; have you come to me at last?—Ah! Octavia, tell me it's true . . . say you love me."

He gathered her in his arms in a frenzied embrace. Standing up and pressing her warm and close, he bent over her. He put his hand under her chin.

"Are you going to let me love you? Are you?" he whispered.

She raised her head as if to find his lips, but he held her face away from him. Looking steadily into her eyes he said:

"Answer me, my sweet darling. Are you going to let me love you?"

She hid her face against his.

For a moment they stood together: then he lifted her on to the bed.

Her nightgown slipped off, leaving her throat and shoulders bare. Seized with an instant fire, he stretched himself on the bed beside her and buried his head in the coldness of her breasts. She lay resistless, while his fingers pulled away all that was left of her nightdress.

He raised himself with an effort and looked at Octavia. Her head was almost hidden by the pillows; her eyes were fixed on him. Her naked body looked very white against the coloured coverlet.

"Tell me may I claim you?—Answer!" he said.

Fainter and fainter came her "Yesses" as she wound herself slowly round him.

A shudder went through his whole being as he fastened his mouth to hers.

He felt her heart leap and body quicken under the ardour of his long embrace.

. . . . .

The moon—pale sentinel of the night—looked at them through the open window.



## THE END—Or the Beginning

MRS. PELHAM had insisted on her son having a home of his own, and more than a year had passed before Octavia had found and furnished a house they had chosen at the less frequented end of Grosvenor Road.

Octavia and Greville were sitting on a sofa together. Every window was open, and the door leading to her bedroom was ajar.

Octavia's condition was causing her husband grave anxiety. Ignorant and apprehensive, he had called in Dr. Sutherland at unexpected hours late and early, to know if there was nothing that could be done. The doctor explained as well as he could that the pains that came and went and general depression from which Octavia was suffering were not inconsistent with the experiences common to women who were on the eve of their confinement. But Greville was conscious that his anxiety was shared by the doctor. Even Gillespie—the nurse—who had been in the house for more than a month, was unable to reassure him.

The breathless day was dying, and the torpid traffic melting away. Long processions of flat barges were moving silently up the sulky river. The whistles of steamers sounded sudden and remote.

"My sweet darling, I hated leaving you this morning; but there was no way of avoiding it. Tell me how have you felt? the heat has been terrific! Is it true you went out shopping—do you think that was wise?" said Greville, holding Octavia's hands over his lips and scrutinizing her face closely.

"Oh! yes. . . . Nursie was with me. You know she comes from my country and was born near Abbotsford. Her accent is a perpetual joy!"

"You didn't go into many shops, I hope?" he said, watching her.

"No, no; I came in early, and have been lying all the afternoon on the balcony. I only bought one thing."

"What did you buy, sweetheart?"

"Something for you to wear if I die; or for you to give me if I live. Promise me you'll wear it always," said Octavia. He held her hands and was silent.

"Would you care very much if it's a boy or a girl?" she said.

"Not a bit: would you?"

"I'd be prouder if it were a boy. There was such a lovely little boy playing in the straw this afternoon. Does one always have straw in the street when one has a baby?"

"Sutherland ordered it. There's a lot of traffic here in the early morning."

"Tell me, Greville; don't women often die in their confinements?"

"No: when you see how many people there are in the world, and all born in the same way, I don't think you need be frightened. After all, your mother had her babies very easily."

"I'm rather disappointed. I thought I'd wake up and long for a tomato in the middle of the night, or something strange—and nothing's happened. I asked Dr. Sutherland to-day if he thought all the things we've been doing together—seeing beautiful pictures, hearing marvellous music, and thinking of wonderful things—would influence my baby; and he said 'Yes.' D'you think he said it just to please me?"

"No, no; my darling, of course not."

"He says it may be born any hour now. The day after to-morrow it'll be the 15th of August; the day Napoleon



and Sir Walter Scott were born. I remember this because I had to write a lot of dates as a punishment, and I couldn't think of all the Kings."

Wishing to get off the subject of her baby, Greville asked her what the punishment had been for. She did not answer.

"Tell me," she said, pressing her face close to his, "if I die, will people say I had been an unsatisfactory wife?"

"My sweet darling, how can you say such a thing! Since the first moment I saw you you have been the unfaltering inspiration of my life!" he said with passion.

Octavia's eyes filled with tears. She leant against him and lifting her face gave him a slow kiss. Suddenly all the colour left her lips. Her hair and forehead were damp: her head fell back.

"Send for the doctor, Greville! Call Nursie quick—I can't stand this! . . . Oh! God! . . . Quick . . . I'm dying," she moaned.

Before either of them could move, the nurse came into the room. Between them they put Octavia to bed. Palpitating with anguish, she pointed to Greville and said:

"You mustn't stay!—Go and fetch the doctor. *No!* *No!* . . . tell him he mustn't stay! My God! . . . My God!"

"Listen, dearie: you just keep still. The doctor's there; he's coming. You've had no pains to speak of yet. All right! all right! you *have*; and in a wee bittie you'll feel nothing. Just pull against me."

Nurse Gillespie made a sign to Greville to leave the room and held Octavia's two hands in a grip of iron.

Dr. Sutherland had been anxious over Octavia's condition for several days, and having seen her before dinner had made up his mind he would not leave the house. In a moment he was by her side.

"You must be brave, Mrs. Pelham. Yes, yes, I will give you chloroform."

"I *can't*, I won't stand this!" said Octavia, wrenching the pillow from under her head and covering her face with it.

After rearranging the pillows and giving her chloroform Dr. Sutherland sent a message to the anæsthetist.

While Octavia was unconscious the nurse went into the next room. Greville was standing listening in the doorway. She told him it would be many hours before the baby would be born: and, determined that he should be out of hearing of his wife's cries, she persuaded him to go downstairs.

The doctor stood motionless watching and waiting. Turning to the nurse, he said:

"I don't like the look of things, Gillespie. I never bring on first babies if I can help it; but in this case perhaps . . ."

"Well, sir, I've said to myself more than once lately that we should have done it earlier—she's such a wee bittie creature; and that nervous! There's no saying what may be going on. She's so up and down, cheery and depressed, it's hard to tell. The pains she has aren't the right ones."

He did not answer. It seemed an interminable time before a distinguished-looking old man came into the room. Lowering his voice to a whisper, he asked the nurse if Octavia had any false teeth. Reassured by her reply, he sat down by the bed. Octavia turned her head and opened her eyes.

"I don't like the strange man! . . . I want Greville! he said he'd never leave me. . . . Ah! there you are, beloved!" she said, seizing the anæsthetist by the coat. "Look, Greville! look. . . . I see grey poppies nodding at me. . . ."

The anæsthetist opened his bag and sat down beside Octavia, while the nurse turned out the lights facing the bed and closed the window. Nothing could be heard but the muffled sound of traffic rolling over the straw in the street.



## THE END—OR THE BEGINNING

Big Ben sounded the slow strokes of midnight ; after which there was a throbbing, distant, prolonged murmur.

Octavia lay stiff and white as a corpse ; the figures round her standing like sentinels in the breathless quiet.

The anæsthetist got up, and whispered to the doctor.

Octavia opened her eyes.

"How cold and dark it is !" she said with a shiver. "Are my hands outside the quilt ? . . . I can't feel them. Why are you all so quiet ? . . . Am I dying ?"

"No, no, dearie !" said the nurse, leaning over her.

Her cotton dress touched the bedclothes. Octavia started.

"What's that ? . . . I hear guns—stop them !—stop them ! !—You're doing nothing !"

"Poor lamb ! it's her that's doing nothing," said the nurse as Octavia relapsed into unconsciousness.

After watching and waiting in a stillness that seemed to echo the doctor went downstairs. He told Greville that he dared not risk Octavia's life, and that unless something unexpected happened, her baby could not be born alive. When he returned to the bedroom Octavia was awake. The curl had gone out of her hair ; it lay straight and matted upon her forehead. Wide and fixed, her eyes were gazing into space.

"I heard everything you said. . . . You need not touch me . . . English doctors can't give chloroform . . . I'm not off . . . I'm . . ."

"No one will touch you, Mrs. Pelham, till you feel nothing," said the doctor, looking at her little face shrunk with pain.

Octavia smiled. Turning her head to the anæsthetist, she entered into a discussion as to the principle on which women in her situation refused to have chloroform.

"Domestic heroism !—P'raps they're brave or p'raps they're . . . Where did you put my letter, nursie ?" she said.

"It's where you put it under your pillow, dearie."

"Tell me, Greville, did you say you wanted it to be . . . Ah! there are the lovely grey poppies! . . ."

She did not finish her sentence. Everything seemed arrested: the air, the light, the furniture, and the figures. The faint rustle of the nurse's movements sounded in Octavia's ears like a battle, and the next thing she heard was her own screams mixed with the wail of a child. She hit out feebly at the doctor.

"The strange man has killed me!" she said.

Far into the morning Octavia lay muttering nonsense; and it was a long time before she was allowed to regain full consciousness.

When she recovered, she saw Greville kneeling by her side. His head buried in his hands. She looked up at the doctor.

"Is it a boy?" she said.

He nodded.

"Is he all right? Will he be difficult to rear?"

After a little hesitation the doctor answered:

"Yes, Mrs. Pelham."

Greville held her cold hands in both of his.

"Why do you all look so sad? Is my baby ill?"

"He's breathing badly," said the doctor.

"But you don't think he'll die, do you?" she said, raising herself. "Then carry me in to see him!"

"You mustn't move, Mrs. Pelham. You've had a very bad time. You've been good and brave. You must lie still."

The doctor placed her back on the pillow, and making a sign to the nurse they left the room together.

Greville put his arms round her. In a voice choking with emotion he told her that the doctor thought nothing could save the baby. Octavia wrenched herself out of his arms.

"Then carry me in! I *must*, I *will* see him before he dies!"



## THE END—OR THE BEGINNING

“Not to-night, darling. You must not be moved to-night.”

“But it may die!” she urged with passion.

Greville stretched across her in dumb agony, his whole body shuddering. She touched his hands and he looked up.

Then she knew.

“Oh, say it isn’t true? . . . It can’t be true! . . . The baby isn’t dead!!”

She crossed her arms over her head and cried out loud.

The nurse came into the room.

“It’s a life taken, and a life spared,” she said.

. . . . .

For days Octavia lay without moving or speaking. One morning after watching Greville arranging roses, pansies and verbenas, she made a sign to him to sit upon the bed. She took a letter from under her pillow. Pulling the wedding ring off her finger, she sat up and placed it on her Bible.

“This,” she said, “is the letter I wrote for you to read in case I died.” She took a ring out of the envelope and gave it to him. “We’ll have another honeymoon now, beloved. . . . Will you put it on for me?”

THE END

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